

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

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AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

By
MARCUS WOODWARD

Author of
"Country Contentments"
"The Woodcraft Trail"
"Week-End Walks Round London"
"Near London"
"The New Book of Days"
etc.



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TO



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And a' babbled of green fields.

HENRY V

P R E F A C E

TH E Arcadian notes here following are a sifting from several thousands which ran a course in *The Morning Post*, where they were printed anonymously in a crowded column of *Varia*, edited at the time by one of the sternest, most just and most scholarly literary critics of our day, the *Post's* Literary Editor, Mr. E. B. Osborn—to whom the writer begs to offer his humble guerdon of a Dedication.

Anonymously printed, in accordance with *Post* traditions—trying to distil a breath of country air among the other paragraphs about all the talk of the Town—these Arcadian echoes here and there struck responsive chords; and the writer treasures a casketful of letters saying that they had given pleasure to some unfortunates “in cities pent,” and asking, Would the notes someday be collected? With diffidence, in answer, a tithe of the printed notes is here offered as a book.

A sonorous passage of Milton has come into the writer's mind, proclaiming that in those vernal seasons when the air is calm and pleasant, it were “an injury and sullenness against Nature” not to go out, see her riches, and partake in her rejoicing; and the thought follows that some who may read this book, knowing how often they offend Nature by staying indoors, may look upon their reading as a penance and atonement.

MARCUS WOODWARD

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1.

JANUARY

CLAD all in White, as the Earth looks with the Snow, blowing his nails; in his Left Arm a Billet, the Sign of *Aquarius* standing by his side.

DAWN OF THE YEAR

LAST night we met several neighbours in the village, gathered to hear the church clock signal the birth of a new year. As the silence was broken by the first midnight note, the firing of a distant gun was faintly heard. At once came an answering challenge from a pheasant in the park across the road; possibly he thought poachers were abroad. From the farmyard by the village horsepond came an excited gabbling, a ludicrous chorus, from a few vigilant geese, as if joyously surprised to find themselves alive to greet a new year. A white owl drifted over the pond, screaming as though he embodied the lost spirit of the dying year. A shrill yapping bark came

from a fox in the park with the last stroke of midnight. "Bad cess to 'e," muttered an old farmer, but we did not know if he cursed the fox, or the year that was dead.

ON New Year's Day, the old story goes, the ravens choose the sites of their nests, first token
The Lane that we have set foot on the long lane to
to Spring April. There are other tokens on all hands, for all to see: fern-like sprays of parsley making delicate greenery in the hedge-banks, new primrose leaves, buds swelling on the willows, and, in a warm corner, a hazel-bush lighting the sombre hedge with greenish-yellow catkins, already beginning to shake loose. The new year's curtain goes up to the hearty singing of thrushes. A pair of partridges is seen, feeding apart from the covey; two cock pheasants are disturbed at a duel; and two jackdaws fly together, like lovers, to a promising, ivy-mantled hollow tree. Even the cock sparrow's vulgar chirp has an amorous ring.

"RAVEN trees," no doubt, were so called from the faithful way ravens return to the same nest
The year after year; the old names cling to the
Raven's trees, as in the New Forest, though now the
Eyrie doves and starlings reign in the ravens' stead. Where, in Highland fastnesses, remnants of the sable brotherhood survive, the hardy birds will be sitting on their green eggs next month, undismayed though snow blizzards rage. Lord Lilford's story of his pet raven, Grip, comes to mind—how Grip was deserted by his bride before she laid eggs in the nest they had built, and how he then carried many stones up to the nest—an expression of despair, or else a hint

DAWN OF THE YEAR

to the truant of her duty, thoughtfully prepared against her return.

WITH the New Year, foxes seek their mates, and on still nights the woods ring and ring again
The Fox's with the short, threefold bark of the dog
Idyll fox in love, and the shrill answering yelps of the vixen, like the scream of a child.

Foxes begin their courtship betimes, since March and April are the months of good omen for the birth of cubs. A green Christmas, followed by a mild New Year, sets the vixen prospecting for a nursery earth, and within a few weeks she will be one of our most secretive wild animals, passing her days underground. Meantime, the young foxes, now almost in their prime, must fight for their mates among themselves. Some will challenge the veterans; and will be given sharp lessons in the game of love, while the vixen, the cause of the trouble, looks on without concern.

WE were amused to-day by hearing a story about "Rambler," a hound-puppy "at walk"
A Hound's at a little inn, who has been enjoying the
First adventure of his young life, for he has
Hunt entered himself to fox-hunting. On a sporting farmer's land he found a drain always favoured in January by courting foxes. Built of ten-inch pipes, it is V-shaped, the arms eight yards long, and there is a roomy nursery-chamber at the angle. The pipes are laid unevenly, to stop any charge of shot which might be fired into the chamber. As Rambler poked his nose into one entrance, a red head looked out at the other, turning this way and that, and

out bolted Mus' Reynolds, followed by his enchanter. Rambler enjoyed a wild hunt, which may be a sweet memory after the years of hard schooling in store for him, when he returns to the kennels.

THE honour of putting forth the first green leaf of the new year belongs to the wild honeysuckle, *The* as was noted by Coventry Patmore, who *Year's* tells how, "In urgency of sweet life," it *First Leaf* disdains snow, frost and time, to put on Spring's livery in mid-Winter. Honeysuckle was ever a poet's favourite, as witness the many references in Shakespeare, including, "Ah, thou honeysuckle villain!" Woodbine being a favourite poet's word for honeysuckle, a puzzle is presented by the line, "So doth the woodbine and the sweet honeysuckle gently entwist." Some hold that the words stood for the flower and the stem respectively; others that woodbine meant convolvulus. But the poet also has the expression, "luscious woodbine," which would hardly apply to convolvulus: unless he here used the old adjective, "lustious," derived from "lusty."

THE young leaves can unfurl early, since they have no scaly wraps to protect them through *The* winter. As the woodbine spirally climbs a *Rathe* young tree, it develops wiry, iron-hard *Woodbine* branches, and grips so tenaciously as to become part of the tree's wood, taking the shape of an entwining snake, and cutting a deep groove. Any straight, grooved portion of a stem is likely some day to make a cherished curiosity of a walking-stick. It loves to climb walls, whence its old name, Caprifole,

TOKENS

from its goat-like hold of rocks. As it climbs it turns with the sun. The pale-green, egg-shaped leaves, now pushing out in pairs, are heralds of better days, no less than the first purple-blotched leaves of the wild arums.

THE era of the primulas began with the New Year, and many a cottage garden can yield a nosegay
The now of the auricula, oxlip, primrose—the
Prime poet's "rathe primrose," that dies forsaken
Flowers or unmarried—and the cowslip, or at least that hybrid offspring, the polyanthus. Of these the auricula alone is a foreigner, one that vies with gentians and pinks in Alpine fields, but it is a very old English cottager, with a history in our gardens going back three hundred years. Its name is a hard one, but the florists have endowed varieties with some poetical titles, like Celtic King and Erin's Queen. Polyanthus is another hard name for a children's favourite, but cottage children recognize one sort as the Hose-in-hose, each flower having another set within. These primulas play at Catch-as-catch-can with Spring, throwing out flowers whenever they can escape Winter's grip.

TOKENS

ROUGH bits of furzy waste where linnets presently will be nesting are now all ablaze with the
The gold of gorse. Goldsmith seemed to reprove
Golden the flowers when he spoke of them as being
Lining so "unprofitable gay," since their appeal to the bees is wasted in January. But the flowers are generally praised as economists in Summer from the way the corolla remains open after being

visited by one bee, with a hanging keel in sign that no other bee need enter—thus saving the bees' valuable time, so that other blossoms benefit. This winter-blooming of the "vuzz" is a token, as an old-time poet sang, that "Beauty liveth still"—the golden lining of a drear January day.

VERDANT tokens of Spring are to be found now in profusion on what seems the barrenest place, *The Old Stone Hedge* the mighty rocks of a stone hedge of a Devon lane. The effect of fresh greenery and pulsing life is largely due to the curious leaves of pennywort, in all sizes from baby round ones an eighth of an inch across to those measured by full inches. They densely fringe the rocks all round, like a living cement, jostling each other in clustered hundreds. Luxuriant, indeed, is the new life of these old stones, with their ferns, mosses, lichens, minute cresses, and spreading foxglove leaves, while here and there the great-hearted Ragged Robin is in bloom. Devon has days in January which might have been stolen from a genial March, and in the sheltered lanes the bleakest day is redeemed by this living garment of the rocks.

ON Dartmoor, when sudden frost freezes the moorland mists and a film of ice covers every spray *A Silver Frost* of heather and fern, the natives say: "The ammil is on"—a curious phrase for the winter phenomenon known to others as a "silver frost." The learned have traced "ammil" to enamel, pointing out that enamelling was an art much practised down to the sixteenth century. It is somewhat

THE SHEPHERD

remarkable that the familiar word of olden days should have survived while its significance is forgotten. Yet the word is most appropriate to a crystallized Dartmoor, when every blade of grass is found fitted into a most delicate scabbard of ice, and all the leaves and berries of the holly-tree dance and sparkle in the sun.

THE first red flower of the year is the red dead-nettle, now in bloom, the powerless nettle, its *January's* name being a corruption of the Saxon *Bouquet* "Deffenettil"; it is still known in some parts as dumb-nettle. Besides the never-bloomless furze, jasmine, and the rash primrose, January's bouquet has dandelion and daisy, shepherd's purse, chickweed, and groundsel that was hailed by old Nicholas Culpepper as "a gallant and universal medicine." The Christmas rose has allies in the shrubbery in green and stinking hellebores; there, also, the periwinkle blooms. A few forward marsh marigolds, buttercups and lesser celandines may be found; and always in January we come to some bank where the nodding violet grows and blows.

THE SHEPHERD

ONCE again, in our walks abroad, we see the age-old picture of the shepherd with a new-born *Lambing* lamb in his arms. No matter how crusty *Days* an old fellow, he turns motherly at lambing-time, and there is much need of mothering among his silly sheep. Days and nights of ceaseless labour and vigil are now the shepherd's lot, ruling out of court the old charge of shepherd's idleness, laid

especially against the men of Salisbury Plain; of whom the story is told that when resting, if asked the way across the Plain, rather than rise to point it out, they would but stretch a leg, saying: "Theck woy," or "Thuck woy."

OLD shepherds remember when flocks were counted by the aid of notched sticks—tallies. When *The* scoring lambs, as they were born, different *Shepherd's* cuts signified single lambs, twins, and *Tally* triplets. Also, when dividing lambs from ewes, notches were cut for each score. An old South Down shepherd has a story of a sheep-dog so clever that he could count five-score sheep as well as his master. As the flock, some two thousand strong, streamed into their fold, the shepherd would cry at intervals, "Five score!" But before he could utter the words, as the hundredth sheep passed, the dog would spring in front of the fold door, thus checking the stream for a moment, until the shepherd had time to notch the score on his tally-stick. Only those who know sheep-dogs intimately would credit the story.

DANGERS are braved by the Highland shepherd, and hardships endured, undreamt of by the *The* Southerner. His enemies encompass him: *Highland* at his going out and his coming in he hears *Shepherd* the scream of the eagle, croak of raven, caw of grey-crow, or sharp bark of fox. In snow blizzards or mountain mists he may fail to reach home at night, and with his hungry dog must couch among the rocks, plaid for sole blanket.

SONGS BEFORE SPRING

SONGS BEFORE SPRING

A CROWD of gay birds means much in a flowerless January garden, and where goldfinches
A Charm haunt a neighbourhood the gardener may
of be well rewarded if he plants ornamental
Goldfinches thistles, or hemp, or flax, as a goldfinch
lure. Time was when a pair of these finches
nested in every orchard, where in spring the courting
cock would be seen spreading his wings to show off
their gold to admiring eyes; but now the "gool finch,"
to use one old rustic gardener's name, is unfortunately
a very local bird. Winter flocks, gay in feathers—the
hens as bright as the cocks and as lively in voice and
motion—were called by our fathers "a charm of gold-
finches"—just as a rookery was described as "a building
of rooks," and a starling pack "a murmuration."

CANARY-HUED yellow hammers are among the showiest
of our hedge-birds, and do much to
Yellow brighten the dull waysides of January,
Yowley especially as now the last year's nestlings
are putting on their bright coats. They court
and pair betimes, and will be singing within a few weeks,
and it is further to their credit that they sing their
monotonous chant for a remarkably long period, from
February until far into August. It seems a pity, by the
way, that the name, yellow hammer, should be estab-
lished, with its superfluous "h" (being derived from
the German "goldammer," or gold bunting), when
we have a variety of provincial names, like yellow
yowley, yeldring, goldie, and yellow stammer, from the
stuttering song. In the North, this bird has incurred the

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superstitious dislike of the peasantry, and is called "Devil's bird," in accordance with an old rhyme suggesting that a "yellow yorling" will—

Drink a drap o' the deil's blood
Every May morning.

IT were hard to say which is the first true song of Spring, since thrush and blackbird, wren, *Spring's* hedge-sparrow, and robin uplift their *Bellman* voices in mid-Winter. Probably the place of honour would be given by many to the first notes of the chiffchaff, as he calls his own name in the woods on a day of March; no warbler has a simpler song, but it is full of pleasant ideas of Spring, and tells of violets and anemones. The mistle-thrush, piping so rarely, is well called "Spring's Trumpeter," and the great tit, "Spring's Bellman." As the hedge-sparrow sings much the same tune as the wren, so the chiffchaff and the great tit share a common song-motive, though there is more vigour in the great tit's ringing "whetstone" note, like the sound of a scythe being sharpened, or like the ringing of a bell clamorous for the rise of Spring's curtain.

THE keeper of a nature-diary might make some curious records of the highest number of different *A* birds heard singing together at one time, *January* or within a space of two or three minutes. *Chorus* To give one humble January record, we heard in harmonious chorus in our garden this week blackbird and song- and mistle-thrush all singing in full-throated ease; the great tit, starting the echoes with its two ringing notes; the chaffinch in

SONGS BEFORE SPRING

merry mood; and Jenny-wren. Over the garden's frontiers a wood-pigeon was crooning its pleasant "Coo coo hoo, coo hoo," in tune with the Spring feeling of the January day. The flute-like call of a nuthatch also rang through the garden, and a starling whistled finely from a weather-vane. It was as if all were uniting to practise Spring's overture.

THE lark finds good cover even in close-reaped stubbles ;
that there may be hundreds in one lifeless-
The looking field is made clear when some
Laverock smart terrier or lurcher has found the joys
of lark-hunting, and races about intent on
putting up every bird. The cover is enough to give
them security, and they may be seen standing erect to
watch the dog, then crouching awhile before drifting
away from under his nose as he rushes upon them like
a fury. In mild Januaries the larks practise the songs
they will bestow upon us so abundantly through the
year, singing for nine out of the twelve months, in the
Summer singing by starshine, soaring to find the sun
long before he has risen.

THE January singing of skylarks seems to be much in-
spired by jealousy. As two sing aloft, below
Songs of in the clover there may be a fair hen listening
Jealousy in critical judgment. Philomel's voice is a
lure to other birds, which draw near with
challenging songs; the thrush will give what seems like
a mocking imitation of some of the matchless phrases.
One day last May a foraging blackcap was singing
softly, humming a tune, as it were—that murmurous
“inward melody”—when a blackbird whistled from the

brake. Instantly the little warbler stopped its busy hunting, and in full voice jealously poured out a torrent of wood-wild notes ; but the blackbird sang on undismayed.

WOODLAND REVELLERS

THE sight of a lively party of six squirrels at woodland revels suggested that the thoughts of the young members were turning lightly to love. In a mild Winter this may be the time when the family party breaks up, having kept together since the three or four youngsters were born in the early Summer last year. It was as pretty a woodland picture as could be seen of wild animal life, as the squirrels chased one another about the trees in highest spirits. The same breaking of family links has been going on among the partridges, who are always in high feather when their thoughts turn lovewards: every gallant cock then spoils for a fight, though it may be merely his own familiar sister that he espouses. A cold spell quickly puts an end to his courting ardour.

BY RIVER AND POND

TROUT may be cold-blooded, but are hot-headed courtiers at this season when spawning, savagely butting rivals and sending scales flying from backs in battles in which the attacker always seems victor. But in more or less harmony the pairs select the beds wherein the female buries her eggs from three to six inches deep—a thousand eggs for each pound weight of her body. Young trout, meantime, wait to devour eggs washed

from the "redd." It will be some three months before the alevins hatch—tasty tit-bits for eels.

THE miller's cat, if not a serious rival to otter and seal, is often a skilled angler, and will dart on a trout lying in shallow water. One has been known to swim to an island in midstream, keeping an eye open for fish on the way. Moles, so essentially of the earth, and earthy, are fast swimmers. The river-side rat leads a semi-aquatic life, is a good diver, and will take ducklings that are afloat. And the vegetarian water vole may do a little fishing at times. In Norfolk Broads^o stoats have been seen to dart on fish in shallow water. Weasels that hunt mice in marshes are as ready to swim after water voles as to climb trees on bird-nesting forays. The cat's love of fish has been held to suggest ancestral angling habits.

A LIVELY pond-dweller is the water-boatman—so called, though its first name seems superfluous; and children are always amused to find that its flattish, yellowish-brown body, half-an-inch long, floats upside down, with its back-ridge as keel, and is rowed by long, hairy hind-legs, flattened like paddles. This accomplished hunter can dive, but the body is so buoyant that it floats at once to the surface. At will, the boatman can turn aeronaut, unfurling the antennæ which are packed away when in water. And it is a fiddler of sorts, making music by striking the forelegs together. It is kept dry in the pond by a coating of fine down, which holds the air, so that when under water it shines like silver.



2.



FEBRUARY

CLOATHED in a dark Skie-colour, carrying in his Right hand the Sign *Pisces*.

SPRING PROPHETS

THE pipistrelle—the countryman's "fluttermouse"—ranks among our minor Spring prophets when it appears on a February evening—*Harbinger* sometimes in broad daylight—hawking up and down a village street to sample the gnat-supply, and it attracts, perhaps, more attention than the first swallow. One wonders that it can find anything worth eating; but there are few birds at present to dispute its fishing-rights. It will be different when the martins come home to the village, and the little dusky-grey, spotted flycatcher, rivals against which the bat will occasionally make spiteful demonstrations. It is not uncommon for a pipistrelle to attack and buffet, with its leathern wings, an innocent flycatcher, showing the while every symptom of extreme jealousy of one it considers as a trespasser on its own preserves. It is strange

that so vampire-like a creature should have been endowed with so musical a name, an uncanny bird-animal that sleeps upside down, can walk without feet, and fly without feathers, and even see though blinded.

NATURE has a law that if moths must need fly in Winter their females shall be wingless, for their
A Minor greater safety, but the law now relaxes, and
Prophet one of the first to take advantage of this is the small eggar. How it forces a way from the compact, hard, seamless cocoon which the caterpillar fashioned is a matter of never-ending wonder. Like the Amazonian hen sparrow-hawk, the female is larger than her smart little brownish-hued male. She is an arch deceiver, and, as she clings to the twig whereon she has arranged her eggs, may easily be passed over as a dry hawthorn-leaf. These moths also are among the minor Spring prophets.

WINTER'S passing may be first announced, and Spring's tocsin first sounded, by the laughing cry of
The the green woodpecker. In records kept for
Yaffle ten years the exultant note has been heard on three occasions on the first day of January. To-day it rings with as heartening a message as voice of mistle-thrush or great tit. That "Yaffa, yaffa, yaffle" note is known in London, or so near that the caller may pass for a Cockney. The bird certainly is a conservative in its love of home; and old-time writers tell of woodpeckers occupying the same hole for their nests twenty and thirty years in succession.

SPRING PROPHETS

FOR weeks past the "Tu whit" and the "Tu whoo" of the brown owls have told their love-story. Courting rites begin with the new year, and some pairs are now nesting. The head of the family will call for a long time on end after a set fashion, from one tree: first uttering a long, single hoot, then, after a pause, running ten or twelve "hoohs" together into one long-drawn, bubbling note, and again, after another pause, uttering the trumpet-like call. One owl answers another like an echo; so that a benighted wayfarer may be cheered by their mellow hootings all the way home.

THE owl called "little" is famed for its varied repertoire of notes, of mewling, barking, and bleating sort, and for a cry like the distressful voice of a rabbit in a snare; but it has also a long-drawn love-call of musical quality. The four or five white eggs are laid in all sorts of situations besides holes in trees; one little owl we know has laid for two seasons under an overturned sheep-trough, and another favoured a rabbit's burrow until the rabbits turned crusty. The gamekeeper much mistrusts these quaintest of owls; one of which, for any crimes it may have committed against other birds, lately paid the supreme penalty when a sparrow-hawk selected it for its dinner.

NOW the blackbird whistles again, in his lazy way—bar upon bar of flute-like music. When singing thus early he pays a rare compliment to the Clerk of the Weather. Most good judges find that in quality his note excels the

thrush's. A starling or a sedge-warbler may imitate easily many thrush-notes, but hardly the blackbird's whistle. His ludicrous alarm-note is another matter. A blackbird was disturbed in some sedges, and went away with the usual terrified cackling. Instantly a sedge-warbler echoed the cry in mocking tones, just as if he would say, "Any fool can do *that!*"

THE tennis-lawn in early morning is the scene of the blackbird duel, and the affair is carried *Blackbird* through punctiliously. The aggressor, re-
Duellists splendent in shining black, with orange spear, advances, with hops and runs, from the holly hedge where he will nest, stopping at striking distance of his rival. He, too, cuts a gallant figure, but has a faint heart, and retreats a few yards, and again at the next demonstration. When he is driven to the edge of the lawn the challenger falls back to the holly fort. Whereupon his rival follows. All begins again and the affair goes on by the hour, morning after morning, without the loss of a feather.

BLACKBIRDS and thrushes have much in common, and live on the friendliest terms, yet have
Mavis habits as different as their contralto and
and soprano songs. The thrush has by far the
Merle longer song-period, and has been singing all the Winter through, while most blackbirds still withhold their richer lay. The blackbird has the more skulking disposition, but if annoyed by cat or weasel shows a finer fighting spirit than his cousin. The thrush is the first to nest, and is now prospecting for sites in the evergreens.

THE SPRING FEVER

MANY gardens now harbour thrushes' nests with eggs; but the gardener who does not hold with the
The thrush tribe may not tell of the early nest,
Nesting or its fate. The thrush is famed for the
Thrush variety of the pitches selected for its Spartan
cradle, with a clay lining that must be hard
indeed for the naked young; we find nests on the ground
and high in trees, in cabbages, under railway-trucks,
below trees where sparrow-hawks' nest, or in the sides of
wheat-stacks. Old nests commonly become the dining-
tables of mice; and they may be used by other birds as
dormitories or as a foundation for their own nests.

THE TRUCE

THE gamekeeper tells how the wild cock pheasant
knows the day of his emancipation. He puts
The on a swaggering air, as if conscious of his
Pheasant's warrant to pass without hindrance down
Warrant the woodland rides. As his strength is, so
will be his harem. And he will have for
devoted bodyguard the self-same keeper who, from
October 1st to February 1st, set a high price on his
head. The keeper has never been in fear of killing too
many cocks. Even if February should find him with
only hens left, cocks would still find out his coverts,
though they came from great distances.

THE SPRING FEVER

ON St. Valentine's Day the birds mate. The good
Bishop of the birds will find that many in
The Birds' his diocese await his blessing, like the
Wedding rooks, to whom tradition more especially
Day assigns this day for their nuptials. The

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

hares might attract St. Valentine, too, for we note they are afflicted already with March madness. Again we see the ludicrous ritual of their courtship, the familiar picture of the Jacks, reared on hind legs, waltzing and boxing, then perchance the sight of the conqueror of a duel stealing softly to the side of the fair charmer.

THE great tit, in his fine primrose waistcoat with the broad black stripe, has taken a wife, or, at any rate, has appointed himself the courtier of a former mate. His ringing love-call of two repeated notes tells the world of the happy event, and he shows off his bride at the bird-table. In the rout there gathered, of lesser tits, nuthatches, and finches in variety, he cuts the most gallant figure: neat in every feather, alert, courageous. Though less excellent in gymnastic feats than the blue tit, he has one trick few birds can rival—the way he perches on a bar, and, with bill and claw, pulls up, inch by inch, the string from which the nut dangles.

As a vast flock of rooks and jackdaws floats in the afternoon air, wheeling in playful evolution, the garrulous and querulous jackdaw notes are in sharp contrast to the deeper bass of the others; the height at which they fly mellows the united cawing, but it may strike a heedful listener that it has an amorous quality. Close observation reveals that many in the flock fly strictly in pairs. These afternoon manœuvres seem part of the rooks' courting rites. Choosing a mate should be a serious business for a young rook, since he will be taking a partner for life—if a virtuous rook. Every day

THE SPRING FEVER

now the nest-trees hold a stronger attraction for all in the colony.

THE rookery is an uproarious place to-day, and the wood rings with wild cawing as the birds swoop madly about the tree-tops, in a veritable spring fever, nest-building being the new order of the day. With frantic eagerness the rooks prune the old elms, their strong bills ruthlessly tearing twigs from the living tree. Bird after bird drops down upon the old nests to weave the fresh twigs in place. The work goes on through weeks, though experienced builders will have the walls of their nest put up in a couple of days. The business-like way some birds set about putting an old nest to rights and lining it with grass suggests they are old hands. And it may be observed that the experienced builders are not robbed like the neophytes, whose 'prentice nests are so often raided and destroyed by the fathers of the colony.

NESTING days have come again for Jack Hern, a strange bird, with his long neck and legs, to make a home in trees. There is always something incongruous in the sight of herons standing on tree-tops above their nests, like guardian angels, or statues of cranes in Japanese gardens. A setting sun flushes their grey forms, and their beaks shine like gold daggers. The heron's love of trees is shown by the way he will perch on one, for a spell of silent meditation, before beginning his evening's fishing. The young haunt the nest-trees the summer through, incessantly clamouring to be fed,

though they can feed themselves if they choose, as has been observed on Romney Marsh dykes in May, when young ones, with undeveloped quills, are found spearing eels. Farmers then esteem them good eating, and say that their brown flesh is like a hare's.

HERONS, pressed for food, are so voracious that if one sails away with something wriggling in its bill several others may give chase, rending the air with frenzied cries of jealousy. But at times the heron seems to fish for sport, and amuses itself by playing pitch-and-toss with frog or water vole, possibly having fared royally. So, when eel-fishing, a large eel will be tossed and twisted about for some moments before being bolted head-first, and it may be released at the last moment, as if to be given a chance of affording future sport. Even the melancholy herons may have a sense of humour.

THE moorhen family that may have lived harmoniously on one small pond through the Winter now breaks up; the old male claims the pond, and with strident challenge turns on his offspring. They can fly better than one would suppose from the clumsy way they leave the water to escape his wrath, steadying themselves by carrying their long legs stretched out like a rudder. They are born fighters, and lively duels take place between two young males over some olive-brown enchanter, who has flirted at them approvingly with her white tail-patch, and taken their fancy by the gay red garters of her green legs.

ON THE MARSHES

ON THE MARSHES

THE burden of the chaffinch's song has been neatly rendered in words by the phrase, "In another month will come the *wheat-ear*!" *In* and his message rings true to-day. For the *Another* wheatear must be on his way, being one of the earliest migrants. His coming will be first noticed perhaps by the South Down shepherds, whom these handsome little birds keep company through the summer, great lovers as they are of hills by the sea. They are well known, too, about the pebbly beaches of Romney Marsh, where they will nest on the beach, or in any old can or kettle they can find for cover; it has been observed that nests among pebbles have no lining of feathers which might give away the secret. Like the swallows, the wheatears return year by year to the same nesting-sites, their true homes.

THE Romney Marshes have been very fittingly called "The Land of Larks," and the larks now *Land of* are singing their nuptial hymns with ever-
Larks freshening fervour over that green and watery country. (But lovers of Sussex Downs cling to a faith that no lowland lark can equal the rain-like music of the downland birds, singing in their refined sea and mountain air.) The marshes respond early to the call of Spring, though vast flocks of gulls and rooks still make typical winter studies in black and white on the green ground. The lark in love cuts a gallant figure, as he hops about his mate, raises his crest, and flirts an expressive wing.

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

SOME of the older writers declare that the skylark sings by the book—in spite of what the poet says *The Lark's* of his unpremeditated art. Opening with a *Song* prelude, *vivace crescendo*, this carries the soarer to his airy watch-tower. Impatience during the ascent is the ruling idea. Then the song becomes *moderato*, broken into short phrases, each repeated several times, making a fantasia. While hovering, head to wind, the ardour gives way to a self-satisfied calm. And as the singer comes down, so, by gradations, his melody sinks. Some say they have made out that the number of the notes accords exactly with the beating of the wings.

THE LANE TO SPRING

SNOWDROPS, always so well loved in old English gardens, have been pushing up their pendent *February's* blooms these three weeks past in Devon *Fair* gardens, to be ready to greet Candlemas. *Maids* The flower that must often arise through snow gains much by cultivating the head-hanging habit; it sheds moisture easily, and can set its seeds regardless of February's efforts to fill dykes. The old English snowdrop, never more attractive than when naturalized in grass (except, perhaps, when growing wild in the woods) holds its own against new varieties, the so-called yellow snowdrops, with their rich yellow ovaries and yellow markings of the inner petals, or the green sorts, with green on the outer petals.

THE LANE TO SPRING

THE interregnum between snowdrop and white violet is filled by the humble green dog's-mercury, *Green* a plant humbler even than the green mos-
Flowers chatel, named *adoxa*—"without glory." Botanists dub such green flowers, and such as the spurges, as degenerates; thus *adoxa*, they say, once sported a gay white or pink corolla. But a green flower may be wise in its generation. *Adoxa*, having no bright colours, avoids attention from undesirable insects seeking its honey, as it cheats the birds by bending its fruit-stalk to hide its seeds below its leaves. And dog's-mercury, at least, has claimed our special human admiration for the very greenness of the carpet it now spreads in the woods, speeding thoughts to cuckoo-time.

THAT we have passed far along the lane to Spring is shown by any country cottage garden, with *Gilliflowers* a goodly display of snowdrop and crocus, of primroses, plain and coloured, and wallflowers precociously in bloom—still happily known by their pleasing name of gilliflowers. Though cottagers' favourites, wallflowers never seem more happy than when living up to their name by growing on the walls of crumbling abbeys and castles, from which habit they are the emblem, in the language of flowers, of "Friendship in adversity." Florists have given varieties grand names, like *Belvoir Castle*, but an old Devon name for a deep-hued sort, often planted on the ledges of cottage windows, is more forceful—*Bloody Warrior*, signifying that it stands sentinel to guard the home. The botanist's name, "*cheiranthus*," handflower, alludes to the gilliflowers' service as noseays.

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

A FLOWER of the day, humble, leafless, but of joyful countenance, is colt's-foot, a flower well known to the train traveller from the lavish way it spreads its gold on barren embankments. It is a flower of wise wits. Blooming betimes, it attracts the earliest insects, when there is no competition from other flowers. It protects its stem by warm scales. In rain, it has the wit to droop its head, and shed the water. Ripening early, its twenty thousand seeds have a good start in life. The cautious leaves appear later, seemingly wrapped in cotton-wool, and grow to the shape of a colt's foot, until ten inches across. They have been used for centuries for the making of a fragrant tobacco.

FEBRUARY has several other flowers, like almond and blackthorn, which bloom before the leaves dare appear. Winter heliotrope, the Continental species of butterbur, which we have naturalized in many lanes, is another flower of the day; and butterbur itself is among the precocious ones, its flesh-coloured flower-heads being an attraction to the first bees out of the hive. The generic name, "petasites," refers to the children's delight in the vast leaves, yet unborn, that will grow to be three feet across, making excellent sunshades.

MARCH





MARCH

IS drawn in Tawny, with a fierce aspect, a Helmet upon his head, and leaning on a Spade, and a Basket of Garden Seeds in his Left hand, and in his Right hand the Sign of *Aries* : and Winged.

MARCH MARRIAGES

EACH day brings its own new token of Spring, some fresh flower-face, or the sight of new courtiers among birds, like that of a pair of jackdaws soaring high into the air, quite in the way of an eagle. Some daws of a manorial park are happily employed to-day in prospecting for nest-sites, though they well know all the suitable places. They most favour old walnut-trees with holes, and two walnuts will give nesting sanctuary to a dozen pairs. Nesting later than rooks, they enjoy long courtships, favouring May for egg-laying.

No birds have proved more susceptible to the blandishments of a precocious Spring than the wood-pigeons.

Crooning to the Moon They respond to the mild weather with the same whole heart as the primroses now sheeting Sussex copses. Not only have the pigeons been crooning their husky refrain about "Tak' two coos, Davey," since Christmas, but nests with eggs have been recorded in many parts through the past two months. Some naturalists believe that, as with common pigeons, it is the male wood-pigeon that sits by day on the two eggs, while his mate takes the night watch. The song is sometimes heard by moonlight: the writer, by passing a roadside nest, recently set a wood-pigeon crooning at one o'clock in the morning.

AN amusing half-hour may always be spent at the rookery to-day, if only in watching the birds in their nests, as Washington Irving says, "quarrelling for a corner of the blanket." One may pick out practised housekeepers; amateurs, who bungle their building, and have their work pulled to pieces by their seniors; honest builders, who fetch their own rafters; bachelors, rapsallions and thieves. But the rooks have an efficient police force, and now and then some incorrigible rogue is proclaimed an outlaw, and is driven from the colony, neck and crop. Then his one hope of salvation is that the police will forget about him, in the stress of their own affairs.

ROOKS are conservatives, with aristocratic tendencies, if we may judge from their habit of nesting in the trees of lordly domains. When a new *Bachelor Rooks* rookery is founded, the experiment is

MARCH MARRIAGES

always started very cautiously. A crowd of rooks will spend hours of a day watching the building of the first two or three nests, and it may not be until after the pioneers have eggs and even young that the remainder of the colony make up their minds to start building in the new homè. These late nesters may be those who are bachelors to-day, and are waiting until surplus spinsters are to be found, sitting out in another rookery.

JACK HERN is now deeply in family affairs; his rule is to make a right early start, being influenced perhaps by the extreme slowness of young herons in growing up; the story of the nesting affairs is a very long one. Early in February the great nests, that may measure four feet across, are put into repair. Early this month (sometimes even in January) the eggs are laid. They hatch in about four weeks, and it is not until the end of May that the young birds, remarkably helpless creatures, first flap from the nest to the boughs, and even in August they are still seen about the nest-trees, clamouring to their parents for food by day and by night.

THE aristocrat of the tribe of titmice is that atom of a grey-and-white, rosy-breasted bird called *Bottle-Tom* long-tailed, whose nesting days come with Blackthorn Winter. Its miracle of a bottle-shaped, lichen-covered nest of two thousand feathers is often set in a flowering thorn. Though like the other tits in its dainty poses, the long tail is a badge of distinction, and it disdains tree-holes as nest-sites. Very sociable, it never seems to be so happy as when one

of a band leading a rout of other birds through the leafless woods, a motley crew of blue, great, marsh and cole tits, with nuthatches, tree-creepers, and golden-crested wrens, enjoying a hunt with a zest like that of hounds in cry. So sociable is Bottle-Tom that two pairs have been known to share one nest.

THROUGH all the roarings of young March the chaffinch, now in brilliant nuptial vestment, *His* has been singing his jolly song, a song of *Merry* Spring as truly as the yellow hammer's, *Note* and distinctive in the rising chorus for its rollicking character. Short and ringing, always the same, there is not a trace of pathos in the quick, jumbled notes. Jollity, not sentiment, seems the motive, in spite of one neat translation of the song, "Sweet, sweet—Bring-my-pretty-love-to-meet-me-here." And it may well be that the cock chaffinch takes love lightly as is suggested by his name, "cœlebs."

A STARLING on a chimney-pot on a bright March morning makes some of the jolliest music *The* of the season, and cuts a gallant figure, as *Sociable* the sun glitters on his iridescent greenery. *Starling* Matins finished, he amuses himself by stuffing straw into a hole under the eave. Nesting-time makes a big break in one of his strongest instincts—his love of a crowd. But he must find a hole for his nest: and the wonder is that there are holes enough for the starling hosts. An inveterate hole-stealer, he will even drive the diligent green wood-peckers from tree-holes they have newly excavated.

WOULD A - WOOING GO

But the gregarious instinct is quick to assert itself, and young starlings gather in merry bands directly they can use their wings.

AFTER peacocks, there can scarcely be a more glorious bird-ornament to any lawn than the *Garden* pheasant in his courting array; and just *Pheasants* now, where pheasants have been induced to haunt gardens, they give every day the liveliest displays of their powers as duellists. A fight between two well-matched warriors is a spectacular affair; wings are spread, and tails are elevated in peacock fashion, as the adversaries face each other, with heads held low, fencing for an opening for beaks and spurs, while uttering their shrill challenges. The fight that follows would have delighted the heart of such a connoisseur of cock-fighting as Henry VIII, had it taken place in his Royal Cock-pit at Whitehall, and yet sometimes, at the end of a long duel, not a feather will have flown.

WOULD A - WOOING GO

THE time of the batrachians is come, and once more the garden frog makes sport for the garden *The* terrier. That his first thought, on waking *Frogs* from winter sleep in the mud, is to go a-wooing, his croaking testifies. In one respect the mated frogs often lack sense, when laying their one or two thousand eggs in a puddle which must quickly dry. The frog's croaking, now a pleasant, rural sound, is no doubt as much a love-charm as the nightingale's song, and he has other points with which

he may hope to soften the heart of his awe-inspiring, Amazonian mate, so much bigger than himself—the glory of his golden eyes, and his marvellous skin.

A TAME toad of a garden; a buxom and matronly toad, lives beside a lily-pond, where she receives

Tale of a Toad many visitors, eating some, and sending others packing with a dose of her venom.

One day she was called upon by a party of baby moorhens, attracted by the water. They came to a stop as they beheld, in evident curiosity, a large worm wriggling in and out of her cavernous mouth. All save one of the chicks decided to retire. The one brave heart advanced boldly, and began pecking at the worm. A lively tug-of-war ensued. But it was the toad that ate the worm, and the small bird, as if fearing a like fate, then beat a scared retreat from the toad's rolling eyes and flashing tongue.

THE crested newt, biggest of efts, is one of the quaintest characters which start life as the pond's

Water Babies water-babies. Now, like the wanton lap-wing, he gets himself a new crest for the charming of a mate, whose love he cements

by whipping her with his tail. The two, agreeing, seek a pond for egg-laying, going ashore when family matters are settled. They have a reputation for stinging, hence, in the fairy play, were abjured, with the equally harmless slow-worm, to do no harm to the fairy queen. Spenser sang of marshes "In which the fearfull Ewftes do build their bowres," a passage of interest as showing how the old name has changed from "an ewfte" to "an ewt," and to "a newt."

WOULD A - WOOING GO

THE courting rites of the peewits while still in flocks, and their incessant search in these days
The for what they consider ideal nesting-sites
Wailing on the marsh, make a delightful March
Whaups study. Sportsmen often argue, selfishly but well, that no birds are more useful to man. They are exemplary in their work for the farmer, never thieving, but ever destroying pests. The virtue in plovers' eggs is emphasized, and the pretty sport the birds give to the wildfowler. More to the point is the fascination of their flight these March days, as the flocks wheel and dip, and the Spring is in their cries, however plaintive and wistful.

THE musical, but to some ears, somewhat eerie call of the golden plover is now heard again on
Whistling the northern moors where it nests. One
Plover Spring call is rendered by the syllables "Tirr-pee-you!" uttered on the wing; besides the plaintive whistle there is a peculiar rippling note in courting days, comparable to the drumming of snipe. Only on its native heath is the concealing quality of its gold-speckled plumage fully revealed. On the nest it is well-nigh invisible, since, like the grouse, it tones in magically with heather, and this in spite of its black and old gold of the upper parts.

THE return last week of a great crested grebe, complete with chestnut frill, to a pond where it
Lovelorn built a floating nest last summer, made the
Loons day red-lettered for some of the bird's human friends. A fine figure it cuts, swimming with head held on high, and in a nervous way

which suggests it is for ever on the point of taking a header. Courting rites make a quaint spectacle, since each sex is demonstrative, and the two lovers will rear themselves high out of the water to display their gleaming white breasts. In Norfolk the birds are now expected to return to their old haunts on the Broads—of which it is well said they are the greatest ornament.

THE TRUANTS

THE wheatear is often first among our truant birds to come home from winter quarters. Now it
The First is a matter of days before it may be ex-
Migrant pected on sheep-walks by the sea. A northern name is steindepill, or stone-dapple, signifying a dapple-mark on a stone, for which the bird might pass on a stone-flecked down. Our name signifies white-rump, from the martin-like patch on the back. In John Ray's "English Proverbs," the wheatear, or English ortolan, is described as "one of the good things of Sussex." The description is true, though one may disapprove of the inference that it is especially good when roasted in vine-leaves.

Now that the stone curlew, with its wailing cry, is back from Winter quarters—their whereabouts
A Spring its secret—Spring cannot be far behind. It
Note is remarkable that though endowed with three common names, not one rings true.

Stone curlew is apt only because it haunts stony uplands and because it cries "Cur-lwee!" Norfolk plover is right in that Norfolk is among its summer headquarters, and wrong in that it is no true plover. And

the name thick-knee should read thick-ankle. It is a bustard-like bird, with the bustard's tricks of crouching and running, and the large round eyes proclaim a bird of twilight.

THE chiffchaff is due, to cry his own name to the woods, at the end of this week, and he is *Chiffchaff* usually punctual. He is the first of the Summer song-birds to appear in gardens, and is the smallest of the garden choir they make up. Naturalists hail him as the truest Spring herald. A modest and midget bird, in quiet olive-green, with black legs, his two notes, "chiff" and "chaff," rarely varied by a "chivvy-chavvy," are as eagerly listened for as the call of cuckoo himself. He comes with the sweet violets, and all sweet things of what our fathers called the Primaveral Reign—the season between snowdrop and cowslip.

ONE of the most fascinating birds of early Spring is the wryneck. Rarely seen in its beautifully pencilled greys and browns (a living picture *The* of tree-bark), its high, kestrel-like note *Cuckoo's* compels attention, and has a message when *Leader* first heard, since the wryneck is the accredited "cuckoo's leader." The ancients were impressed by the flashing of the bird's long tongue, which never flashes out for ants' eggs in vain, and concluded that it had uncanny powers of fascinating its prey. In sorcery it became a love-charm, hence it has figured in literature (in "Hereward the Wake"). A lovelorn maid would sacrifice a trapped wryneck to the tune of the invocation, "Wryneck, bring my man to the house."

AT HEAVEN'S GATE

THE March day that gives the music of larks falling on leagues of blossoming gorse recalls a fancy
Larks and of the poet (Swinburne)—how the sun fills
Gorse the gorse's gold "with odour like the colour." The botanist would have us note that the plant is not what it seems, but is a relation of clover, as is clear from its infantile trefoil leaves; even its fragrance of honey is deceptive, as it is without nectar; the bee that unlocks the petals being rewarded by an explosion of pollen-dust. The poet, caring for none of these things, would make us see how the lark's song and the gorse-bloom accord on a March day.

IT is always with special pleasure that we hear the song of the woodlark; this minstrel is not common, and his song, to many ears, is sweeter,
The purer, and less guttural than the pibroch
Skylark's of the skylark. He is known by his spiral
Cousin song-flight; if seen at close quarters, by the strongly-marked eye-stripes and the short tail. Smaller than the skylark, he is richer in hue. And he is more at home in trees than the skylark (who knows only earth and air), often flying to trees if alarmed, singing in trees, and thence launching himself heavenwards. If it is possible for any voice to be more joyous than the skylark's, it is surely his cousin's.

HOVERING may well be the supreme art of bird flight, with our wind-hoverer and lark among its
Art of supreme masters. The kingfisher makes a
Hovering shining picture as he hangs above the

IN WOOD AND MEAD

stream. The goldcrest is also an expert hoverer, and its midget form is often seen, quivering below a branch. Titmouse, sparrow, starling, and robin hover occasionally, and several warblers, whitethroat, wood-wren, and willow-wren, have a hovering mode of flight. In Summer the nightjar poises, his long wings almost touching above his back: in Spring the courting wood-pigeon poises in mid-flight, looking like a picture of a dove in an old picture-Bible.

IN WOOD AND MEAD

HISTORY is repeating itself in the woods, where now there are tiny leaves on the elm tree's brushwood, and silver birch and hawthorn *Pheasant* are fast breaking into greenery, and the *Duellists* cock pheasant is selecting his seraglio.

Veterans are causing trouble among the youngsters, driving them far afield, whereas the keeper likes to see a promising young cock in undisputed possession of eight or ten hens, lord of a happy harem, content with one chosen haunt, where the nests will be near together. The warrior pheasant makes a glorious picture as he swaggers along in his full war-paint, crimson cheeks aglow, crowing his challenge to all comers.

SNOW in the woods holds for the gamekeeper a record of every poacher in fur that haunts his *The* coverts. At night, no fox, stoat, weasel, *Trapping* badger, hedgehog, rat or minutest mouse *Month* may stir without charting his every step in the snow. The hare leaves a trail so marked that a blind man might follow. The overlapping of

trails, a troubling of snow, and a few scarlet stains, tell of a poacher's kill. The information gained is vouchsafed at a timely hour for the keeper, who now opens his March trapping campaign. Through this month all his energies are bent on keeping down rabbits and vermin.

INTO a pasture where a bunch of lambs were cutting capers leapt, from a small spinney, a fox, *Reynard's* as if to join in the play. He out-capered the *Little* liveliest of the lambs, and pounced and *Game* rolled with the playfulness of a puppy. The lambs seemed to welcome a new playmate; watched his antics awhile; then made a skipping charge, which drove him back to the spinney. A moment later he reappeared, and the lambs romped to greet him, but, after running a circle, he quickly retired, leaving the lambs all alert to carry on the game of "I spy." The fox may have spied the approaching shepherd. His play seemed innocent: but who would trust him but a lamb?

THIS week we may find in woods an anemone more precious and lovely than the many-hued *Wind* sorts that for so long have been flaunting *Flowers* in flower-shops. The discovery of the first wood anemones makes a red-lettered day as memorable as the day when the first chiffchaff comes and calls its name in March. The dead whiteness of the anemone is set off by the tinge of pink on the petals (or sepals), and now and then a drift of anemones is found with the flowers purple, or even a delicate sky-blue, within and without. They are well-named wind-

flowers, and though they turn their faces away from the wind they dance to the slightest breeze.

WHILE the woods show the faintest signs of burgeoning, new greenery spreads daily over the stone *Mother-of-* hedges of the west country, where the *Thousands* pennywort makes a living cement to every rock. On bridges and grey-walled ruins the dainty little ivy-leafed toadflax is making good headway, a plant of remarkable sense and sensibility, deservedly called *Mother-of-Thousands*. The tiny lilac flowers are sun-worshippers, but directly the fruit is formed each flower-stalk turns from the sun to the wall and, bending, deposits the seeds in any cracks discovered. In rustic parlours, this charming wilding is sometimes grown with its slender branches depending in a flower-pot suspended from a convenient beam—an old-fashioned cottage ornament.



4.





5.

APRIL

A YOUNG Man in Green, with a Garland of Mirtle, and Hawthorn-buds; Winged; in one hand Primroses and Violets, in the other the Sign *Taurus*.

PROUD PIED APRIL

YOUNG April takes up with a will his task of greening the world—"making it all one emerald."

Advertising The hawthorns turn green while we wait.

April For the promise of a screen at last for his eggs, the blackbird gives due praise. He praises every spring thing—himself included, one suspects, for there seems something peculiarly self-expressive in his lazy notes. The bird's behaviour often suggests that he is a pessimist as black as his coat—the way he skulks in shadowy places, like the embodied spirit of a Blackfoot Indian. But his voice proves that his heart is as golden as his bill.

WHAT the poet meant by naming the month "Proud, pied April," is very clear in the beech-woods,

Pied where the trees are now breaking, in their
April hesitating way, into verdure, with here a small spray of greenery on a tree, there

one whole branch in leaf, but one only, and with small trees, growing in the shade of their fathers, fully clad in April's livery. The pied effect of the verdure against the prevailing purple-brown tones suggests green veils hanging out to dry. Perhaps nowhere in England may such carpets of violets be found as cover the floor of Buckinghamshire beech-woods to-day. But the glory of the moment is the cherry-blossom, the cherries towering up like pyramids of snow.

THE dainty wood-sorrel is sometimes known as Alleluia, also as cuckoo's or gowk's meat, as it blossoms when the cuckoo comes. It is remarkable among flowers in that both its blossoms and leaves obviously fall asleep, against rain and nightfall; the flowers folding their petals and hanging their heads, the three leaflets of a leaf folding downwards, as if to keep warm by cuddling. The property of sleep is believed to reside in minute pink swellings at the base of each leaflet. Neither the flowers of the violet nor the wood-sorrel, as we know them, produce seeds, but are succeeded by seed-bearing flowers, which do not open; so far an unexplained mystery of botany.

IN several counties the fortunes of the magpies are in the ascendant: on the Sussex downs their numbers multiply, and in many of the Buckinghamshire beech-woods one is rarely out of hearing of Mag's guttural chatter. The great nests are to-day a very conspicuous feature of the beech-woods of the Chilterns. Mag's eggs—much like a jackdaw's—show her affinity with jackdaws, rooks, and

crows, and her nest, with its dome and its thorny pali-
sade, is considered a comparatively new and an advanced
type of crow architecture—becoming to the craftiest
and most mischievous of her tribe.

BEECH-TREES are unkind to other plants, and because of
their sunproof leaves the beech-wood
Beech-wood floor is commonly brown and bare in
Flowers summer, save for a few wild orchids. But
before the leaves unfold, the early wild
flowers have a chance to blow for a brief season, and
to-day the floors of Buckinghamshire woods are covered
by a rich tapestry of violets, anemones, and the ethereal
blooms of wood-sorrel. And in Sussex beech-woods,
in the St. Leonards Forest district, the wild daffodils
will be succeeded in a few days by azure seas of blue-
bells: already the children have carried home in triumph
small bunches of the earliest bells.

ONE of the prettiest floral pictures of the April hedge-
row is made by stitchwort, whose grass-like
Starwort leaves are veritable grappling-hooks to drag
the brittle stems through the herbage until
the flowers can shine out like stars. The plant was
anciently called "All-bone," a name which puzzled
Gerard, as he could see no reason for it, unless "it
were so called of contraries." Our name may refer to
an old faith that a decoction of the plant cured stitches
in the side; but it is also traced to the Greek word for
sting, as the plant was among the many cures for a
serpent's bite. But starwort is the name that best be-
comes the gleaming flowers.

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

THE cuckoo-pints now make a brave show of greenery in every hedge, to greet the belated cuckoos.

The With their great green spathes, shaped like
Cuckoo's hare's ears, they have ever caught the fancy
Plant of herbalists. The name, lords-and-ladies,

is traced to a notion that the floral club is like a person of quality, sitting with dignity in a sedan-chair. Gerard, in his Herbal, associated the plant with bears, describing how they relished it after fasting for forty days in winter. Certainly pheasants and others appreciate the roots, though it is not clear why the cuckoo should rejoice in the spadix.

THE SUMMER BIRDS

THIS week we are likely to be deceived again in thinking we see our first cuckoo when it is a sparrow-

Cuckoo or hawk that flashes across our path. Nature
Hawk? seems deliberately to have fashioned the two birds in the same mould. It is suggested

that it was done to frighten the titlark, whose nest the cuckoo would violate, even though titlarks summon courage to mob cuckoos. And it seems likely that they mistake the weak, harmless insect-eating cuckoo for a ravenous hawk. We can hardly suppose they recognize the cuckoo as a parasite, or share the prejudice in which many people hold the bird.

IN April, says the Norfolk proverb, the cuckoo shows his bill; in May he sing, night and day; in

The July, away he fly. Now, in Blackthorn
Cuckoo's Winter, his two old notes are full of good
Magnetism cheer; though it is true they inspire mingled

THE SUMMER BIRDS

feelings, such as are expressed by a forgotten sonnet, which opens by apostrophizing him as "Thou monotonous bird!" and closes by wishing he would call for ever. For all his sins, and his sleep-destroying calls to the rising sun, he has some magnetic power to compel our liking. And a hundred stories prove how he makes slaves of other birds; so that if a helpless young cuckoo is kept in a cage with a young thrush, scarcely fledged, the thrush will feed its fellow-prisoner with utmost solicitude. •

CHIFFCHAFFS, all through an April Eastertide, delight holiday-makers by their cheering song of *First Leaf-* two notes. These little leaf-warblers are *Warblers* now established favourites, and it is remarkable to recall that, like willow-wrens and wood-wrens, they were hardly known in the eighteenth century, and had no English names; it might almost be said that they were discovered by White of Selborne. The willow-wren (though he confused it with the garden-warbler) he knew by its "joyous, easy laughing note," a happy description of its silvery chime; the chiffchaff he called "the chirper," making the surprising statement, "It utters two sharp piercing notes, so loud in hollow woods as to occasion an echo."

THEY came over the cliffs of Newhaven in the grey of dawn, resolving themselves from a small, *The First* smudgy cloud on the horizon into purposeful units, their identity clear from the *Swallows* forked tails. Soaring over the cliffs at fifty miles an hour, the party began to break up before it was

out of sight. The arrival home of a pair of barn-nesters was duly noted—how they flew on an arrow-straight course, without abating a jot of speed, cleanly through a small hole in a board under the barn's eave, to the old, crumbled stucco nest on a beam, and by a joyous twittering announced themselves as the first swallows to return to the farm. With their advent, Spring seemed to come at last.

A **STANDING** mystery of April is the way the swallows come and vanish. Cuckoos and swallows
The Swallows' Vanishing Trick may have been seen in places for a fortnight, while many woods are still waiting to have their echoes stirred by the cuckoo's call, and many villages have caught but glimpses of vanguard swallows: the main body still delaying. Every year it is anxiously awaited by naturalists concerned by the greivous thinning of swallow ranks through many past summers. The vanishing trick is thus explained: swallows whose nesting-place is distant from water retire for a while, after reaching home in Spring, and again before setting sail in Autumn, to congregate at the nearest river, moat or pond. Mid-May is time enough for their egg-laying.

HOUSE-MARTINS returned a few days ago to some of their village homes, and were seen spending a joyous hour or two—judging by their animated twittering—inspecting their stucco
The Martlets' Return castles under the eaves. The inspection over, they retired, as if to discuss future building plans and rest awhile before seriously taking up house-

FAMILIAR BIRDS

keeping. They seem to bring with them a train of summery ideas. Their fleet forms and flashing white rumps bring life and movement to the sleepy village street, as they bring welcome music, with their melodious warbling and the crooning songs they sing in the nests.

THE "screechers" are due to arrive within a week, the sooty, scythe-shaped swifts, well-named, being the swiftest of our birds, *The* pursuing their headlong course sixteen *Screeching* hours a day, whether round the old church *Brother-* tower or a thousand feet high. The swift is *hood* the swallow's cousin in the eyes of country people. But he is no relation. The swallow sings, for one distinction, and sings as melodiously as a garden-warbler, whereas the swift only screeches. The swallow, again, perches safely on a telegraph-wire, while swifts cannot perch, and even collect nesting-material on the wing.

FAMILIAR BIRDS

ROBINS have all been migrating through the past few days. The familiar garden robin, who has *The* haunted the lawn by a house-window *Robin's* through the winter, paying for his crumbs *Nest* by song, has flown to the orchard, and there is making his nest in the ditch-bank, among the white violets. By one infallible sign an expert on birds' nests always knows how to find any robin's nest in a bank—the sign of dead leaves at the entrance, spread like a doormat. The leaves are actually laid in place before the nest itself is woven in a

saucer-shaped depression, cunningly fashioned in the bank. The doormat may serve some obscure object of camouflage.

ROBINS are credited with a passion for nesting in old
 kettles, yet it is a triumph to find a kettle-
When nest, even when there is a good crop of
Robins kettles in a wood near cottages. Though so
Nest friendly to man, Robin is always as willing
 to nest in a solitary haunt as in a garden
 outhouse. His favourite site is a bank, but sometimes he
 nests on the floor of a wood, risking the perils of vermin.
 It is engaging to find nests within reach of craftsmen at
 work. Sir William Jardine, writing about 1839, re-
 marked on the intense devotion of the birds to the old-
 fashioned saw-pit, which in Spring would always
 harbour nesting redbreasts, sitting within a yard of
 toiling sawyers.

IN the attribute of friendliness to man, the marsh-tit
 comes next to the robin: no wild bird is
A more easily won by kindness. In its
Fearless Quakerish garb, with a black cap for sole
Titmouse ornament, it looks like a poor relation of
 the swaggering great tit, in his primrose
 vest slashed with purple. But in its friendliness the
 marsh-tit is the most charming of the family. The
 moment it discovers an hospitable board spread in a
 garden, it makes itself at home. And it is easily lured
 into houses, will hop without the least fear about
 tables, and will perch on heads and shoulders, even on
 the pen of a quiet writer.

BRIDAL DAYS

BRIDAL DAYS

THE nesting-time of the owls has set in, but nest-building is an absent instinct—they scorn feather-beds. The little owl is content with a ledge in a tree's hollow; the brown owl will lay almost anywhere, in tree-holes, on the ground, in cliffs, or, like a sheldrake, in a rabbit's burrow. The long-eared owl has good cause to lay its eggs betimes, since it occupies another's nest. It must be a shock to a pair of sparrow-hawks, when they return to their last year's nest, a month after owls have taken possession, to find installed a family of angry-eyed, hissing owlets, uncannily like cats, with their ear-tufts and mewling voices.

LINTIE, the linnet, now assumes nuptial plumage, and is remarkable as an instance of a bird making a display of wedding finery in Spring without moulting. In Autumn, feathers grow on the cock's head and breast, having broad, greyish edges, which conceal through the Winter their crimson hues. The edges wear off, displaying the spruce carmine waistcoat, and now, with his sweet voice and gay bridegroom aspect, he cannot fail to charm a mate. It is unfortunate for linnets that no caged wild birds of our land are more companionable, or have happier, livelier songs. They are credited with fine ears for music, fanciers claiming that a caged bird with a perfect voice will refuse to sing in competition with a poor performer.

THE grey wagtail, slender and graceful in form, radiant as sunshine in hue—the sprite of the moorland stream

Ariel of the Streams —is almost our loveliest small bird, in the first flight with goldfinch, bullfinch, and the harlequin stonechat. Through the Winter the wagtail has been a chaste study, the upper parts bluish-grey, the rump yellowish-olive, the throat shading from white into oranges and yellows. Now the male puts on his full nuptial plumage, and wears as love-token a resplendent ebony gorget. There will soon be a nest in tangled herbage under a ledge of the bank, for it is his ambition to rear two broods, which shall enliven our rocky streams by their sylph-like forms.

ON park ponds the courting rites of the wildfowl now make entertaining studies. "Coppernob," *Pond Courtiers* as the children call the pochard, circles amorously round his darling duck. The slender pintail drakes display their long tail-feathers to enchantresses, who seem to take no notice, only answering their soft "inward" courting notes with harsh quacks; they are not always faithful lovers, and will hybridize with the mallard. The little black-tufted duck, with his jaunty crest and golden eyes, utters piping notes, and the mallard bows ceremoniously, and has the courting habit of up-tipping himself in the water, with down-bent head and up-thrown stern. Like other true lovers, the wild ducks run into strange capers.

PARTRIDGE pairs begin to scrape out little hollows for their nests in meadow hedgebanks, though *Early Partridge Nests* the wise partridge waits for early May before laying, and June comes before the first hatchings rejoice the gamekeeper.

COUNTRY CHARACTERS

Often he can do a good turn to the nesters, as by setting a trap to catch a hedgehog, or moving a nest under which a mole has driven a tunnel where a weasel might run. One point may be observed on finding a partridge's nest, that the birds have chosen a pitch, it seems deliberately, with a screen of guardian brambles between the nest and the footpath way.

THE pretty siskins are now deserted by their Winter companions, goldfinches and lesser red-polls, and make an early start in building their snug nests in the fir-woods, nests of moss, wool, horsehair, and feathers, of interest to the squirrel and the jay, who have a shrewd eye for the bullfinch-like eggs. The restless little cock, as bright as a canary, has a hurried and most pleasing song, into which all kinds of familiar notes may be introduced. He often utters this delightful miscellany on the wing, much in the manner of a pipit. But, unlike the pipit, he will sing his song through two or three times during one flight, as if he cannot do enough to cheer his sitting mate.

COUNTRY CHARACTERS

A NEW arrangement of our birds might be made, according to their dispositions, whether solitary, social, wary, bold, joyous—or joyless. Does any bird stand for more profound melancholy than the heron? The buzzard, sulking on a stone hedge in Cornwall, is well compared to the hunchbacked King Richard, sullen on his throne. One bird would need a

class to itself, the mouse-like tree-creeper, most modest and retiring of all our birds, yet always at work, hopefully climbing trees. But at this happy season of the year it often breaks its rule of silence by uttering a tiny, shrill, sibilant note, and a ghost of a song of three or four notes: even the tree-creeper feels the spring fever.

THE jay screams if you pass his nest; the blackbird cackles; the tomtit hisses like a snake; but *Songs of Challenge* the wren challenges by a ringing lyric, as if daring you to approach one step nearer to his secret. The sudden, loud song may well distract attention from the nest, which perhaps is the wren's idea. The lark also sings if put up from a nest, and the sedge-warbler, newly returned to its reedy haunt of yesteryear, outpours a hurried song whenever disturbed, by day or night. The whitethroat, too, sings to scold trespassers.



MAY





MAY

WITH a Sweet and lovely Countenance, clad in a robe of White and Green, embroidered with several Flowres, upon his Head a garland of all manner of Roses; on the one hand a Nightingale, in the other a Lute. His Sign must be *Gemini*.

MAY'S ANODYNE

It is the week of weeks for the beech-woods. Their brilliantly vivid and fresh greenery makes *Green* a woodland colour scheme which can have *Cathedrals* no equal until October turns the leaves fox-red, but the freshness will pass before May is out. One must go into the deeps of such great beechen forests as cover the Chilterns to feel the full sense of the vivid colour. Usually beech-woods are credited with brown leaf-carpets, but many of those of the Chilterns are as green underfoot as above with the myriads of year-old seedlings: or are of bluebell ultramarine. The utter silence of some of the green aisles adds a cathedral-like effect.

It is pleasant to know of badgers in a countryside, though they are rarely seen. They have fastnesses from which it seems they will never be driven. If forced from less impregnable strongholds, they have a way of reappearing after many years, as if by virtue of ancestral memory. Gamekeepers note the same point about woodcock—they vanish, but return after years to one spot, perhaps not a feeding-ground, undistinguished from others over leagues of land. A generation ago, on the Sussex downs, in the days of one remembered as “The old Squire,” a famous badger and fox stronghold was utterly effaced by blasting. Badgers are there to-day, and with families.

A FLOWER of to-day is the Pasque-flower, almost first in beauty among our wild flowers, queen of our anemones; a rarity of the short down grass of the Chilterns, or other downs and limestone pastures. It blooms later than its lowly sister, the wood anemone, and its leaves, and the chalice of imperial hue, are remarkable for their silkiness. Two other rare sisters are found in the wilds, the yellow and the blue mountain anemones: these are aliens. The Pasque-flower is a native, and a wildling, though it looks as if it had wandered from a lordly garden-bed, to blush unseen in some wild and secret place.

ARMIES of daisies that invade golf-courses arouse deadly anathemas; but deserve a word of admiration for their easy victory over the grasses. Their leaf-rosettes take firm possession of

FLOWERS AND SONG

the earth, and each spoon-shaped leaf is so arranged in a mosaic as to have its full share of sunshine. The white, barren florets, an advertisement to insects, are also a warning banner flown in the sheep's face, but their main task is the unfolding of the fertile florets when asleep. It is curious to observe how by the raising of a cone each floret, as it swells in ripening its fruit, is given a fair standing-place in the sun. The daisy is a warrior, admirably equipped for battle.

FLOWERS AND SONG

A SETTING of flowers adds delight to birds' songs, as when a chaffinch is in his element, on a
The flowery orchard bough; or Pettichaps, the
Orchard garden warbler, sings tirelessly on from
Bough his perch on a white mountain of cherry-blossom. The chaffinch has but one short stave; the willow-wren's song lasts three seconds; the nightingale sings as he listeth; but Pettichaps emulates the feats of the sedge-warbler that sings by the hour. The meadow of his cherry-tree platform has an embroidered verge of cowslip, primrose, violet, anemone, stitchwort and purple orchis, and the warbler sets the whole flowery picture to appropriate music.

PETTICHAPS is among the six or seven songsters whose supremely sweet voices place them in the
The foremost rank. Though he has no special love
Blackcap's for gardens, he often makes one musical
Understudy by his presence, and will nest among the peas or in a gooseberry bush; the name may carry a tinge of reproach, suggesting that this

charming minstrel is as fond of fruit as a blackbird. The song is hardly to be distinguished from the song of the blackcap, that "mock nightingale"; the garden-warbler is the blackcap's understudy, though he lacks the master singer's rich, flute-like voice.

LIKE others in love, the male lark assumes a swaggering mien; putting on an unusually alert air and gait, with elevated crest he hops in pursuit of his mate, abandoning his usual run; and now and then he will throw out one wing, and give her a distinct flick. A great lover, he raises two broods, and this perhaps partly accounts for his long song-season, extending over at least ten months. But a month before the skylark, the woodlark, more happily called laverock, already has settled down to nesting duties. From the repeated "lu-lu" of his love-song, he gained the euphonious scientific name, "Ullula," for his dulcet music.

LARKS sometimes cease singing at the apogee of their song-flight, and hurtle silently to earth, and now and then one soars in silence—
The Rival and now and then one soars in silence—
Larks this is when in pursuit of a rival making music aloft. He mounts in a purposeful way, and his silence suggests he knows he needs all his breath for the desperate adventure: overhauling the singer, he closes in battle. In one such a contest we witnessed, the attack failed signally. The pursuit had been too hot, perhaps, for a good fight. After a skirmish the attacker fell to earth like a plummet, without having uttered one note of music, while the victor, soaring again, filled earth and sky with his pæan.

VOICE OF THE TURTLE

THE affairs of a pair of tree-creepers nesting in an orchard form a curious study in secretiveness; perhaps we have no birds so unobtrusive, and they are more abundant by far than would be supposed by those attracted mainly by bright feathers or arresting song. They are truly like ghosts of birds, and their forms blend magically with the tree-trunks they haunt. Incessantly climbing the trunks in quest of insects for the nine nestlings in an apple-tree's hollow, the cock is too busy to stop to sing his apology of a song: he must do a wonderfully useful work in the orchard. Before the summer is out his mate will doubtless oblige him by laying another clutch of from six to nine eggs.

BY chance or choice, birds often build among the wild flowers. A floating nest of a great crested grebe, set about by yellow water-lilies, was one pleasant picture of the summer. The sitting-days of a finch nesting in a flowering may-bush must be fragrant indeed. The garden-warbler delights in a bush of wild roses; the long-tailed tits nest among blackthorn blossom; corn-crakes among clover. A robin's nest in a wood was set artistically beside a guardian spike of purple orchis. One pipit's nest is among cowslips, and a wood-wren's made the prettiest picture among bluebells.

VOICE OF THE TURTLE

OUR three wild pigeon cousins, the ring-dove, the stock-dove (which lacks the other's neck-ring), and the rock-dove (whose ancestors fathered our tame pigeons—pouters, fan-

tails, tumblers, homers and the rest), have now been joined by the gentle turtle-doves, no near relatives, but with many habits of the typical pigeons. They are less destructive birds, preferring weed-seeds to corn. Like the wood-pigeons, each of a pair of parent birds will do sitting-duty on the eggs. The turtle-dove excels the pigeon in slenderness and grace, and its voice is softer and a more purring coo than the pigeon's.

IN THE COVERTS

A PAIR of sparrow-hawks started making a nest in March, but so leisurely did they work that *The Hawk's Eyrie* only a fortnight ago was it ready for the first egg, five others following at two-day intervals—perhaps the handsomest eggs laid by any of our native birds. A rare and curious woodland sight is the feeding of the young on birds brought in chiefly by the dashing little male. The hen takes delivery of his catch, tears up the spoil, already plucked, and distributes it to the youngsters: studies in softest white down, but rapacious-looking, and with needle-sharp talons.

MY lord the cock pheasant dances fairly close attendance on the half-dozen members of his *The Pheasant's Wives* harem in the early days of their nesting. He has a quiet way of paying them visits, giving a peculiar sort of crow and fluttering his wings to announce his royal approach. As sitting-time draws near the hens begin to add their breast feathers to the nests. A full clutch being laid, for a day or two the nest may be deserted before the

NIGHT BIRDS

hen settles to the four-and-twenty days of hatching. When one hen comes off her nest to feed, others follow, and the proud cock may then be seen feeding with his unassuming wives.

A RED squirrel was racing at speed along a low branch in a Chiltern beech-wood when it spied
The Alien danger ahead in the form of a human being,
Squirrel and instantly turned itself into a statue; for a long ten minutes it clung motionless to a beech-stem, and not a hair flickered. Suddenly a small sound electrified it into life, and it bounded on as if some fiend were on its trail—as it was, no doubt, in a red squirrel's view, for a great grey squirrel came in ferocious pursuit. The aliens are now spreading through the Chilterns, though game-preservers have set a price on their heads.

NIGHT BIRDS

THE mistle-thrush seems to blow his trumpet-calls for all the world to hear; other songs seem
Song of dedicated to one listener's ears—possibly
Songs human ears, as when a tame robin perches on the spade of a gardener who has been digging, and whispers a confidential lyric of thanks for worms. By a forest stream the writer found the beginning of a nest in a thick bush, a homely structure of oak-leaves. Through the thicket there presently slipped a slender, brownish bird, and as she went to the nest with some small roots there was breathed from a brier nearby a long-drawn note of purest melody, thrice

repeated, and then a nightingale broke into full song, singing, it seemed certain, to hearten his true-love's labours, and for her delight alone.

THE nightingale—"chiefest of the little nimble musicians of the air," as old Izaak Walton *The* quaintly said—was "Aëdon," the singer, *Singer* to the Greeks, since there is but one singer whenever he utters his flute-like notes, his "music of the moon." As the male nightingales come first, it has never been doubted that their songs are genuine love-songs, and signals to lure mates. Bird-catchers have a curious legend that if a bachelor be captured it may live as a captive even for twenty years. But if taken after it has fallen in love, wooed, and mated, it will pine to death, which goes to suggest that genuine passion throbs in the nightingale's heart, as in his music.

THE bird of mystery is now due, the nightjar, with his strange, unbird-like rattle-song. All his *An Un-* ways are the ways that are dark, and have *canny Fowl* fostered the wildest legends, as that he milks goats. He stands curiously apart from other birds; even in the way he perches, choosing to differ by crouching lengthwise along branches. His structure, too, has points of mystery, such as the exact purpose of the mouth-bristles, and the serrated middle claws. He comes forth in the mysterious gloaming, flying in an uncannily noiseless, ghost-like way, yet as swiftly as a swallow; but sometimes will clap his wings, as if with deliberate intention to startle.

S W A L L O W - T I M E

NATURALISTS note with satisfaction when swifts arrive in great force, and it seems that they increase in numbers as certainly as swallows diminish. In many an old village every glance skywards becomes focussed on the swifts' sooty forms as the never-resting voyagers circle above the housetops. The way the swifts of a village arrive in a compact body suggests that they have kept together since last summer. It is pleasant to hear their wild screams in the twilight of May evenings; but, welcome as they are, they cannot make up for the loss of the swallows.

THE swifts' habits suggest that they are wholly wrapped up in their own affairs, and that these are of the utmost urgency, owing to their being able to stay with us for little longer than twelve weeks. They hold themselves in a marked way aloof from man and other animals, including most birds, and there is a certain admirable fearlessness in their conduct. When accepting the low eaves of thatched cottages for nest-sites, they pay no attention to the cottagers or their children, and scarcely deign to notice the cat which eagerly lies in wait for their fleet forms as they flash to the nests.

A CLOSE observer of a wheeling swift may note a remarkable feature of the flight, how the long, scythe-shaped wings work independently of one another, so that in a photograph one wing might be shown depressed and

the other elevated at the top of its beat. When we can watch the wing-beats of other birds we always find that the two wings work as one. The swift's mode of flight is a series of tremulous beats, followed by a glide on stilled and outspread wings. The almost unmatched speed may be due largely to the freedom of wing-play, which certainly accounts for this bird's marvellous power of checking and turning when in headlong career.

A PAIR of swallows perched on the ridge of a roof, the cock singing. It was no swallow-flight of *A Winged* song, but a regular serenade, and as he *Figaro* kept up his warbling for minutes on end (like a musical version of the creaking of a roller), his hen grew restless. As if she had had enough of his flattery, she fluttered away from his side to the far end of the roof; but he sang on without pause. Suddenly she began working her wings with every show of petulance, and, opening her beak to widest extent, she charged upon her lord and fairly brushed him from his perch.

CHATTERBOXES

EVERY hedge has its whitethroat now, and every whitethroat calls out against all passers-by: no *Trespassers* birds are more alert to warn off trespassers. *Beware* The fledglings add scoldings, snappings and croakings to the parents' protests, as if hedges were made for whitethroats: they are trained from the nest to cry out against mankind. Most emphatic is the "tchak" note which suggested half the rustic name, Nettlejack, the other half being derived from the warblers' love of a nettlebed.

A FEROCIOUS COMMONER

THE lesser whitethroat never attracts the attention given to the greater, whose antics in the
A Minor hedge as it vehemently sings its scolding
Minstrel song—turning and bowing, and flicking its tail—endear it to all lovers of a leafy lane.

The amusement it inspires is reflected in its many rustic names, like the Scots nickname, Blethering, or Chattering Tom. The lesser minstrel is less abundant, with no arresting power in its short ripple of song, but this song has a musical quality, and all the charm of a song sung very softly, as if for you alone.

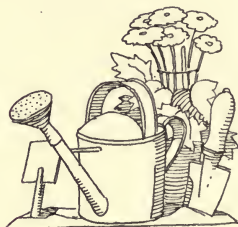
THOSE small birds of desert places, the various chats, so named from their notes suggesting the
The Chats clicking together of pebbles, are birds with distinctive characters and dress. The wheatear's true element is the bare down by the sea, where it is recognized from afar by the badge of the white rump. The whinchat, haunting wastes where whin grows, might be proud of its distinctive eye-stripe, and remarkable habit of making a tunnel of grass whereby to approach the nest. The stonechat, in its handsome coat of black, white, and rufous hues, is the desert's harlequin.

A FEROCIOUS COMMONER

“THE Sparkler” is a rustic name for the voracious tiger-beetle, that flies in May on sandy
The Tiger commons, a brilliant and sparkling being,
Beetle with its blue-green, yellow-spotted wing-covers, and shining blue underside, which throws back the sunlight. If on a first flight, it will have

lived already, mainly as a grub, through three Summers. All its life-story is one of tigerish ferocity, for as a grub, when inhabiting the pit wherein it was hatched, its habit was to lie in wait at the entrance for passing insects: a ferocious-looking ogre now transformed into a living jewel.

8.



JUNE





9.

JUNE

IN a Mantle of dark Grass green, upon his Head a garland of Bents, Kings-Cups, and Maiden-hair; in his Left hand an Angle, with a box of Cantharides, in his Right the Sign *Cancer*, and upon his arms a Basket of seasonable Fruits.

BIRD NOTES

THOSE who sleep out through summer nights—and fail to sleep—well know how musical they may be with bird-song. Some of the most attractive bird-music is the least known, the “music of the moon,” whether the sedge-bird’s babbling by the moonlit stream in summer, or the rush of wigeons’ wings on a frosty winter’s night, and their beautiful “whee-ou” whistle. Thrush, robin, and even blackbird will occasionally sing in the midnight watch. Gilbert White amused himself by grouping birds according to their songs; one list was of night singers, but it includes only the nightingale,

"in shadiest covert hid," the woodlark and the sedge-warbler, described as "a sweet polyglot, but hurrying." In other lists reference is made to the way the grasshopper-warbler "chirps all night," to the stone curlew's loud, nocturnal whistle, and the crooning song of the nightjar in the night watches. The calling of the cuckoo at night perhaps would not be included among songs; the wailing of peewits or the croaking of corn-crakes; but it is remarkable that the sage of Selborne omitted skylarks from his list, since they sing long before dawn.

LAPWINGS are vigilant birds, and will wail and fly all through a moonlight night. Wood-pigeons *Birds that* will croon through the night-watches; *Never* house-martins in their nests in high summer keep up a prolonged warbling, as if they *Sleep* can ill-brook the tedious hours when wings must be folded. But the palm for sleeplessness perhaps goes to our winter visitor, the Brent goose. Ducks tuck their heads in their wings to sleep, as London citizens well know, from watching their good-night rituals on the margin of the Serpentine. The Brent never seems to sleep at all—is seen to be awake when viewed by day at sea, and is heard to be noisy all night. He may ask, with Philomel and Milton, "What hath night to do with sleep?"

THE jay is on sentry-duty all day at this season. He is never more vociferous than when he is *The* courting, and woods ring with his raucous *Sentry* cries, if primrosing trespassers pass his way. *Jay* It is one of the harshest cries in nature that

BIRD NOTES

now greets anyone who approaches the bush where the jay intends to nest. But a few weeks later, the nest being built and the hen being on her eggs, you may pass the nest as noisily as you please without a sound of protest, though the jay's anxious eye—"wicked eye," the keeper would call it—is closely watching your every movement.

"BIRDS that sing as they fly are but few," wrote White of Selborne, and made a list, including only *Songs on the Wing* lark, pipit, swallow, whitethroat, blackbird, and wren. The thrush, as well as the blackbird, will occasionally sing while flying, sometimes while hopping after worms. The little wood-warbler trills its summery song as it flutters across the woodland glade. Goldfinches and linnets seem so overflowing with happiness that they cannot cease their songs for flight. Never does a linnet fly to a pond to drink without twittering a grace on the wing, before and after refreshment.

SOME birds with strong voices are exceedingly shy of showing themselves, like the nightingale *The Reel Birds* and the corncrake, and the grasshopper-warbler, which is as timid as a mouse, and lives a secretive sort of life under cover of grasses or sedges. Like the nightingale, it sings its best under the cloak of night; or perhaps sings its very best just as dawn is flushing. Then it mounts to some little elevation, a twig or the top of a sedge, and with quivering form and widely-opened bill, with head turning from side to side, shrilly utters the strange song which earned it the name "Reeler." At the least alarm it vanishes, like a concert singer leaving the platform.

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

THE pied wagtail's nickname, Peggy Dishwasher, has puzzled many wise heads. "Wagtail" is also a curiosity of a name, since the restless *A Diffident Minstrel* tail rarely "wags," but for ever flicks up and down. And this charming sprite of a bird has been labelled with a puzzling scientific name, "lugubris"; possibly an ill-conceived reproach for lacking in the whites or the canary-yellows of other wagtails; or perhaps because Peggy's mate is a most diffident minstrel. He sings one song while the chaffinch sings a thousand. But when he does oblige, his voice is a low, pleasant warble.

LARKS' nests are marvellous for the art and ingenuity with which they are hidden and made *The Larks' Treasury* secure from the feet of cattle. The cunning lark chooses a cup-like depression, and therein so weaves, felts, and presses down her nest of grass that its top edges are flush to the ground's surface; it looks exactly as if some heavy roller had run over it, to make it perfectly fit the cup. Larks are timid, but the nestlings show a bold spirit, pertly standing high on their legs, like gamebirds, if alarmed.

ATTAR OF HAY

ALL the countryside is fragrant with the aroma of hay, but even more fragrant is what an old-time *Honey-suckle* poet called the "bounteous smell" of such a bower of honeysuckle as is commonly found festooning thatched cottages, and looking in at their latticed windows. Here the honey-

suckle is in its element; as a moral writer on field-flower favourites well remarks: "It seems to shed a happy quiet and contentment." It is sweetest in the evening, when intent on luring moths to its honey-vats, and especially after rain: we can almost hear the raindrops in Izaak Walton's description of a shower on his honey-suckle hedge, "which fell so gently on the teeming earth, and gave yet a sweeter smell to the lovely flowers"—what time the birds were holding their friendly contention with an echo.

TRAGEDY stalks with the mowers, as they begin to cut the fields of hay, tearing away the veil
Death in which has given sanctuary to rabbit, field-
the mouse, hare, weasel or hedgehog, and many
Hayfield a bird. The farmer finds what he calls
 "stolen" nests of poultry or guinea-fowl.

The gamekeeper is fearful for the sitting partridge that will sit so closely as to be caught by the mowers' knives. Their eggs, and those of larks and pipits, possibly of a corncrake, may be the perquisite of the rooks, which march and countermarch across the shorn field, seeking also nests with young voles. In the evening come other hunters, like the farm cats, to pick up parent mice searching for their nests and young.

THE sight of a young cuckoo on a haycock, being fed by a meadow-pipit, impressed one with the
The idea that it is an ill-mannered bird. If it
Gowk had had the sense and courtesy to crouch down, bringing its head to the little foster-mother's level, she could have fed it easily; but as it lifted its ugly head to the utmost height, she was

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

obliged to stand on its shoulders to drop food into the cavernous mouth. When a farmyard cat stalked into the meadow, the cuckoo paid no attention to alarm-cries, only gaping for more food. It seemed as stupid as a dotterel, and almost deserving its odious old-time nickname of the "gowk."

DOWN THE LANE

LIKE a little flower of the air, the orange-tip butterfly now zigzags down the parsley-bordered lane. The quidnunc notes the fallacy of its *Orange-Tip* name, which falsely describes the female, while the actual tips of the male's wings are black. It was born a mimic. The caterpillars are now found on seed-pods of hedge-mustard or lady's-smock, and are marvellously like the pods, and keep pace with them as they grow. When the butterfly rests, it lays back its showy fore-wings, and elevates its hind ones, whose greyish-green mottling blends magically with the parsley's colour scheme.

To and from her hole in the old willow-tree goes the leaf-cutter bee, fetching and carrying from a garden sections of rose-leaves for her *Upholsterer* nest. Within the hole is some bee-bread, and her egg. With mandibles for scissors, with exquisite art she cuts narrow pieces of leaf for upholstering the sides of her cell, and circular ones for the end, as round as if designed by a compass, flying off with a triumphant hum, always on a bee-line for the nest. Her toil finished, she dies; perhaps never thinking that while she was away from the cells, an

TREE BIRDS

ichneumon fly laid eggs beside her own, whose grubs alone will benefit by her labours.

MOTHS

HAWK-MOTHS in a room stir alarm in female breasts as surely as the advent of a bat. They are the largest and handsomest of our moths, but *Uncanny* have uncanny features. The beautiful *Moths* death's-head is regarded with superstitious awe from its skull-like marking and its unique power of uttering a squeak. The humming-bird hawk-moth may not be recognized for a moth as it drifts into a room, the curious tufts of hair fringing the body suggesting a bird's spread tail, the wings beating so rapidly as to invest the form with a sort of halo, and making a droning noise. The bee-hawks resemble bees, and no doubt gain by being dreaded in consequence.

TREE BIRDS

AN engaging picture is made by a family of young green woodpeckers, as they emerge from the nest-hole; four are seen, perhaps, *The* clinging anxiously to the tree-trunk, stumpy *Yaffle's* tails pressed close to the bark, while a *Family* fifth surveys the green world from the hole's entrance. Their first costume is of true feathers, speckled in effect. In a silent wood the cry of the wary head of the family rings out, loud and exultant, as the youngsters leave the nest, a cry sometimes compared to a shout of demoniacal laughter.

SOME naturalists have held that the provincial names of birds should be discarded from serious works; this was the view of Knox, the Sussex ornithologist, though he seems to have approved of "barley-bird" for the yellow-wagtail which comes at seed-time, of "rinding-bird" for the wryneck, as it comes when oaks are stripped, of "parson-gull" and "duck-hawk," and of "yaffle" for the woodpecker. A happier provincial name for this bird is still to be heard in Kent—galley-bird. This must be an ancient name if it comes from the Anglo-Saxon "gal," merry, in reference to the laughing note that forebodes rain.

To hear in the woods to-day a wild screech from a jay, and then to hear the wild laughing cry of the green woodpecker, is to receive two strongly contrasting impressions. In the early-Spring concerts of the jay—a sociable bird when courting—there is a wonderful variety of suggestive notes; like a mocking bird he can neigh and he can bleat, and like the little owl he can produce sounds that might come from dog or cat. His harsh scream leaves a suggestion on the mind of a bird whose days are full of anxiety. But the yaffle's call is one of the happiest in Nature.

TREE-LOVING birds often have their favourite trees; thus, the willow-wren seems on its natural stage when spilling its silvery chimes from the shining leaves of a riverside willow-tree. The starling is famed as a bird at home everywhere; perhaps no bird is

found nesting in so many different situations. It is more at home in a tree than a blackbird, and runs more swiftly over meadow or lawn, and is as much at home on sea-cliffs, in marshes, or in woods as in city squares. Yet the starling is certainly a great lover of the walnut-trees now tardily coming into full leaf, and will spend hours on a walnut perch, merrily whistling its medley of notes, and clapping its castanets.

SPOTTED flycatchers are welcome little migrants, since they come so faithfully back each season to the same garden nesting-sites. Quiet in *The* plumage and voice, they attract more *Faithful* attention by their fly-hawking excursions *Flycatcher* than many birds in gayer coats. The modest flyfisher seems listless enough as it perches motionless on post or rail, waiting for its prey, but always attracts the eye by its manner of darting in sudden pursuit, quickly returning to the perch to await the next victim. Pairs—or possibly one pair—of spotted flycatchers have been known to nest in a creeper against a house-wall in nineteen Junes in succession.

THE pied flycatcher is a rare bird in Southern England, but shows a marked devotion to Wales. *The Pied* This is a choice little bird, and in its black *Gallant* and white dress suggests a duodecimo magpie. The hen is a quiet edition of her mate, and has a quiet spirit, meekly suffering the somewhat imperious ways of her lord; but he will charm her by his song, often compared to a redstart's. And he gallantly protects her, giving battle to neighbouring flycatchers which trespass on his fly-fishing preserves.

These birds would be warmly welcomed if they could be wooed from Wales and the North to our insect-plagued southern shires.

BULLFINCHES are remarkable among our finches for going always in pairs in Winter and early "Bully" Spring. They are among our birds which attract more attention in those seasons than in Summer, partly because their numbers are reinforced by migratory birds. "Bully's" gay coat shows up bravely against the quiet hues of the hedges he haunts with his hen in their quest of dock seeds and berries. The borders of large woodlands seem their favourite nesting-place, and old, wild hedgerows. It is a pity that the gardener's cherished buds lure them from their natural haunts, often to their undoing, for by nature they are stay-at-home birds, and great lovers of the greenwood.

WATER SPRITES

ONE pair at least of great crested grebes had safely fashioned their floating nest, the birds taking turns in sitting on their four rough eggs. Leaving the nest, they were careful to cover the eggs with reeds, gathered by the bills, thus hiding their treasures and keeping in the warmth of the hotbed of sodden herbage. A charming picture is now made by the precocious chicks, as they induce their parents to tow them about the pond, by gripping the parental feathers in their bills—(feathers they are in the habit of eating)—seek shelter under their wings, or, in the way of cygnets and baby dabchicks, clamber up for pickaback rides.

TO THE WEST

AMONG rushes fringing a common's pond snipe are always in evidence, and there is no mistaking their sign on the pond's margin, where the probing of their long, straight, sensitive bills has covered the mud with a pattern of minute holes. No bird has a more sensitive worm-indicator than the snipe in its nerve-lined bill, and it is a perfect worm-catching tool, marvellously flexible, so that no more than the tip need be opened to nip the wriggling prey. The bird's eyes are set far back, so that it may look behind it while the bill is buried. And it has a quiet trick of stamping to put consternation into the worms' hearts.

PERHAPS the humblest member of the reedbed's choir is the reed-bunting, that contributes only two or three notes, but does so with praise-worthy, if somewhat stammering, persistence, as he perches near his nest on some swaying reed; time and again he seems to be crying the words, "Don't hurt me!" The cock is an ornament of the choir, with his black cap, white collar, and finch-like bill. He is proud of his nest, of reeds, grass and moss, delicately lined with hair or reed-flowers, and of the handsome, purple-blotched eggs. A good-hearted bird, he shares his mate's building labours, and takes his turn in brooding the chicks.

TO THE WEST

ONE pleasure of going into the far West country is the chance of seeing a buzzard soaring and floating in its stately, buoyant, eagle-like way, or displaying a gift of hovering almost

the equal of a kestrel's. It is sad, indeed, that it should be on the vanishing list of our large birds of prey, for there is much good work in the world for a buzzard to do in keeping down rats and mice, beetles, worms, and other "varmints" on which it lives, rather than on its own kind. But the buzzard is mistrusted by birds as well as gamekeepers, and it is a fine sight to see a rook making a dashing attack on the hawk, with the air of a St. George going forth against a dragon.

FROM a fern-covered bridge spanning a Devon river one may espy a hole in a bank where, for *Bejewelled* years, kingfishers have nested. On a lucky *Birds* day one may see six or seven fledglings, which have passed from their dank cradle into the exquisite river scene, all perched in line on a branch, awaiting their rations. With the sun glittering on their iridescent feathers, it is an almost dazzling picture. Hitherto they have been kept closely at home by their parents on their bed of fish-bones. They would run grave risks if they ventured abroad until well grown, since they put on their exquisite raiment, the hens being as richly arrayed as the cocks, while still in the nest.

JULY





JULY

IN a Jacket of light Yellow, eating Cherries; with his Face and Bosom Sun-burnt; on his Head a wreath of Centaury and wild Tyme; a Scythe on his shoulder, and a bottle at his girdle: carrying the sign *Leo*.

THE DOG-DAYS

WITH July and the dog-days the midsummer hush falls on the birds. But some voices which have been somewhat drowned in the early summer chorus attract the ear once more, notably the twofold call of the chiffchaff; it sings its best, indeed, in July. Bird-life is more abundant now than at any time of the year, and every hedge is full of strange notes uttered by the young birds. These are great days of hunting for hedge-vermin, and for the sparrow-hawk. All too often we hear sorrowful plaints from bereaved bird-parents, echoing the feeling in Macduff's tragic words, "All my pretty ones—O hell-kite!—all at one fell swoop!"

To observe the utmost devotion of mated birds to one another one should look among the plain-hued and songless ones: thus the humble, *Lovely in their Lives* unadorned flycatcher is as fussy as a cock partridge over his hen; never far away, and for ever popping titbits of food into her bill. When he is proud of some feat of fly-catching—as when he has taken a butterfly on the wing—he will land near the nest whereon his mate sits, and give a peculiar call—“Zit-zit!” She seems to know it means that he has something really good to offer, comes off the nest, and for five or ten minutes suffers herself to be fed, as though she were a helpless nestling.

It is woe to almost any insect that drifts across the croquet lawn which a spotted flycatcher *The Croquet Lawn Bird* has made the headquarters of his summer fly-fishing. The hoops serve him admirably as watch-towers, and as he continuously makes his circular tours of the ground the sharp click of his beak, closing on his prey, brings a sense of the sternness of life to the quiet pleasure-lawn. His way is to make a goodly collection of flies before he hies to the nest to pass them to his young. He does not hesitate to bring them bees, and he ranks with swallows and nightjars as an expert butterfly hunter, a sport at which sparrows and others are sorry bunglers. The birds have a marked attachment for pleasure-lawns. They are now building second nests, or sitting on second clutches. The flycatchers are usually the last of our summer bird visitors to arrive; they at once set about nesting, with none of the usual delay observed by other migrants, and it seems that they are kept so busy

during their short Summer season that the cock has no leisure at all for singing.

THE time of the clear heat upon the herbs is the time of the birds' silence; but about the harvest
Songs of fields the yellow hammers and the corn-
the Corn buntings sing on perpetually, and there is something in keeping with a sleepy noon-tide of the dog-days in their monotonous chants. And we owe a debt to the greenfinches for their tinkling music of these days. Where a canary is set to sing in a cage outside a cottage window, and a greenfinch sings in a garden, it were hard to distinguish one strain from another; or to note any difference in the happiness of the free bird's song and the captive's. The greenfinch, in his sage-green coat, yellow-trimmed, always appeals to us as being among the happiest of birds, one that must for ever be musically prattling, so that it will sing on the wing. Wordsworth's title fits it well, "Brother of the leaves."

A MINOR moorland pleasure of August (not shared by insects) is coming eye to eye with a lizard
The Way as it basks in the heather—the lizard
of a which, if you neither move nor sigh too
Lizard loud (as it is written in "Aurora Leigh"),
 "Will flatter you and take you for a stone."

Then it will flash about your feet (to say it runs is to do scant justice to its amazing speed—it is seen and is gone), or will itself sit so still that it might be lifeless, if it were not for the light in the jewels of eyes. The lizard enjoys a sun-bath when the noontide quiet holds

the hill, but is active enough when an adder is on its trail.

MEADOWLAND

"I CAN never read in Summer out-of-doors," said Richard Jefferies, nor, he added, could he write: "Three words, and where is the thought? Gone." What makes reading under some meadow-tree an almost hopeless task to-day is the multitudinous insect life attracted by the open page. Some midge, fly, spider, ant, or ladybird, lands on the book every moment, and small green grasshoppers seem to delight in the book as a spring-board. Above the grass, in the light of a low sun, the air is seen quivering with gold-winged mites. Small wonder that the birds dearly love a shorn meadow where every step, every peck with the bill, and every wing-beat disturbs fresh game.

HAYMAKERS have scarcely left the shorn fields before they are painted in gold once more by those dandelion-like flowers on which hawks feed (they say) to brighten their eyes. Few country people, whether learned or "no scholars," can give these common flowers of the chicory group their rightful names, many of them amusingly descriptive, like yellow goat's-beard, or Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon; bristly ox-tongue, cat's-ear, hawk-bit, hawk's-beard, and mouse-eared hawkweed—the botanical hair-splitter has made out of this last flower's genus over one hundred species. The handsome orange hawkweed has earned, from its black hairs, the quaintest name of all—Grim the Collier.

IN SHADIEST COVERT

THE beech has an ill-deserved reputation for so keeping
 out sunshine that no flowers will grow in
Under its shade, but many a beech-wood to-day
Greenwood has its floor covered by drifts of the curious
Trees plant, wood sanicle. Its leaves are very
 decorative in their glossiness, and the ele-
 gant way they are cut into lobes, and the minute white
 flowers manage to make a goodly show by rearing them-
 selves two feet high. The plant is interesting for its re-
 putation as a healer of all inward hurts and outward
 wounds, whence its name, from *sano*.

THE great beech-woods of the Chilterns offer a succes-
 sion of floral pageants; carpets of violets in
The Fox's April, seas of bluebells in May; and now
Flower the massed ranks of the foxgloves are
 making one of the most magnificent wild-
 flower shows of the year. So in Cornwall to-day the
 foxgloves of the stone hedges blaze the trail of the moor-
 land roads for miles. Individual plants are six feet high,
 and may have some three hundred buds and blossoms. It
 is often disputed whether the word "foxglove" has any-
 thing to do with foxes; but it is the fox's flower in that
 it so often grows about his den in a sandy bank.

SWEET wild strawberries now ripen for the fairies'
 dessert in beech-woods. And if housewives
Fairies' take the advice of worthy old Tusser, in his
Straw- sixteenth-century work, "Five Hundred
berries Points of Good Husbandry," they will
 transplant the wildings to gardens, for

those that grow among thorns in the wood, "well chosen and pricked, prove excellent good." Another herbalist recommends that they be served in claret, and remarks that in Devon they are so plentiful that they may be gathered when riding on horseback; certainly in a Devon lane they may be picked from the back of a Dartmoor pony. An old name was "Straberry," and "Straberry ripe" was among the old London street-cries, a name possibly from the plant's habit of straying by aid of its runners. On chalk downs one may come upon beds of the wildings covering an acre or more. It is a crop much neglected, in spite of its delicious, if elusive, flavour. But in Paris, *petites frais des bois* are sold at nearly every street corner. The plant is wonderfully decorative, with its charming trefoil leaves, and, above, the glistening, drooping, red fruits, fit to make a fairy's mouth water. A larger wild strawberry is sometimes found, the Hautboy, standing for the first result of efforts to cultivate the original wildings.

OVER THE HILLS

A WALK in Surrey, about Guildford, yields to-day a botanical treasure in woad. Botanists are inclined to think that most of the woad we come upon to-day is descended from plants brought over from the Continent to be cultivated for the sake of the dye. Yet this is a plant which has played a great part in our nation's story, if the philologist is right in tracing the word Briton to the Celtic "brith," or painted, signifying a man daubed, for lack of wardrobe, in the juice of woad. Thus to this humble-looking

HEDGEROW PICTURES

plant, with its small yellow stars of flowers, we may owe our chief race-name.

THE slopes of chalky downs are now bravely spangled at night by glow-worm lanterns, shining with a soft, green radiance, scores together in favoured places, those, no doubt, where snails abound. As glow-worms live on snails, eating them out of hearth and home, the gardener harassed by the summer's snail-plague might profitably set his boy to collect the insects from the hills and lanes, as country boys delight to do. And certainly the glow-worms, when turned loose on a grassy bank or "in a dell of dew," make a bewitching illumination for the garden.

HEDGEROW PICTURES

AN aspiring great bindweed took a hitch round a hop growing in a hedge, and, with or without declaration of war, started climbing. The *Climbers* struggle was a silent one, not spectacular, *at War* but there was no doubt of its intensity, plant struggling with plant for light and air. The bindweed is as artful as the hop is redoubtable in climbing: put a prop six inches from a young bindweed shoot, and it will reach out and find it, though the prop be frequently moved by an inch or so. Yesterday the bindweed out-topped the hop. Now it triumphantly flaunts its enormous white trumpets from the hop's highest spray, and they seem to be sounding a blast of victory.

A TURTLE-DOVE sitting on an apology of a nest, a scanty platform of twigs, is a common *The Dove's* hedgerow picture of these days: as the *Nest* dove's soft crooning (a sound well suggested by the scientific name, "turtur") is typical of a dreamy midsummer afternoon. The nest never fails to arouse wonder, having so few twigs that the small white eggs are clearly visible from below. One can only suppose that the flat, rough, draughty platform must be an uncomfortable place whereon to sit on hatching duty for a fortnight. A turtle which elected to lay in a rook's old nest seemed to be endowed with an unusual sense of comfort.

YOUNG THINGS

THE rearing-field, where the young pheasants are learning their first life-lessons, is always a *The* favourite haunt of wild birds, the pheasant *Pheasants'* chicks' unbidden guests, sharing the sumptuous meals provided four times daily by *Guests* their keeper. The keeper rather likes to see robins, thrushes, starlings, and other birds, if not rapacious, about the coops, as they clear up surplus food, which might turn sour. The fowls, acting as foster-mothers to the pheasants, are marvellously vigilant; their heads seem to come through the bars of the coops the moment the shadow of a hawk crosses the field, and the little pheasants are as marvellously obedient to the orders to take cover.

THE young of shy birds, like jays, are often engagingly tame on first exploring the world, their confidence

The Art of being a Jay highly exasperating their parents. But the little jays have a smart, wide-awake air even in the nest, and are apt pupils in mastering the art of avoiding life's dangers, in when to scream and when to hold their garrulous tongues. The old birds are model parents; the cock does sitting duty, and there is no more danger for cock than hen, since each is as gaily painted as the other. The family party always seems on the best of terms, the young staying with their parents almost to the year's close.

MANY and peculiar are the trials of a young sea-bird, like a razorbill. On seeing light, it is in
A Sea-Bird's Trials peril from rapacious gulls. Then it must face the hazardous feat of leaving the cliff-ledge for the sea: some fishermen declare the parents carry the young by the necks. At sea, they are at once distressed by their parents diving, and set up disheartened cries. Later, if wintering in the far North, there may be leagues of ice to be crossed: and a hungry fox in waiting if they fail and fall. The razorbill, now with young on almost all our coast cliffs, is always of peculiar interest, as being a small edition of its vanished relative, the great auk.

COB, the swan, is a proud bird to-day, with his grey-billed, drab cygnets about him; his magnificently proud bearing at once distinguishes him from his mate. The guarding
Trials of a Swan of her eggs during the long six weeks of their hatching must have tested his devotion. Other troubles come with moulting days, which mean that he

loses all his quills and the power of flight. The cygnets now make incessant demands that he shall fish for water-weeds. They have little of the precocity of ducks, are babies enough to enjoy pickaback rides, and it will be a year before they are promoted to white feathers.

A LITTLE grebe is seen buoyantly floating on a pond: something causing alarm, it sinks like a *Birds Like* plummet, until only its head is above the *Submarines* surface. Danger still threatening, the head sinks until only the tip of the bill is showing. Other divers, ducks and cormorants, know the trick, but ornithologists confess it passes their comprehension. Young moorhens will hide by floating submerged below lily-leaves, and have a trick, not usually practised by more professional diving ducks, of using wings as oars.

A YOUNG barn-owl, mistaking moonlit water for a solid substance, flew from a tower of Bodiam *The Castle* Castle, in Sussex, into the moat seventy *Owls* feet below, and, becoming entangled in water-lilies, was unable to rise. This feudal castle is a thing of sheer beauty, its grey walls rising out of water now sheeted with that white lily which the poet demanded should be given him before the passionate rose:

A long-stemmed lily from the lake,
Cold as a coiling water-snake.

And, like snakes, the lilies to-day hold fast the unruffled form of the floating bird.

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

THE MOAT

FLOATING serenely on the quiet waters of a moat, the white and yellow water-lilies suggest rival beauties. The white-chaliced ones may stand for chastity, but the gold cups of the others suggest bibulous ideas: the curiously alcoholic smell and the flagon-like shape of the fruit having earned the name brandy-bottle. Old-time botanists could hardly find words enough for praising the white lilies. "There is I know not what of awful in their beauty," wrote one enthusiast, and added, as though driven by desperation to ungallantry, "It is to all flowers what Mrs. Siddons is to all other women."

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

AN old and true observation is that the swifts are most active in thundery weather: during *The Swifts'* storms they are seen pursuing their head-long courses as if they would race the lightning. "Nice observers," as Gilbert White remarked, have believed that when in hot weather they form parties that race and scream above villages, the cocks are serenading their sitting hens, who answer, as the screechers rush by, with notes of complacency. Other nice observers think with reason that in late hours of July evenings the cocks play an earnest game of pursuing the hens (which have left their nests for an airing) to herd them back to their duties for the night.

JULY is pre-eminently the butterfly month; in every

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

Month of flower-garden dance these flowers of the
Butterflies air. Where they are cutting the oats, the
humble gatekeeper butterfly flits on zigzag
flight, living up to its name by settling on gate or wall;
and Io, the harvest butterfly—the gorgeous peacock—
now airs its velvety wings. Many more species are
a-wing than last month. The brimstone's heyday
comes with July; and the fritillaries come on their
rich, golden-brown wings, chequered like the petals
of the fritillary flower. The comma is a late-comer,
too; unlike any British butterfly with its scalloped
wings, and their sign of the comma painted in white.
It is the month for the heavenly blue butterflies;
for the swallow-tail of the Fens, in yellow and black;
and in town as well as country gardens the lordly red
admiral spreads his gorgeous wings to bask, disdain-
fully shaking them when any other insect comes be-
tween the sun and his nobility.

THE dandy dragonfly, hawking back and forth above a
pond's surface (trapping insects in the
Dance of hairs of the legs), turns with such magical
Dragonflies speed that one might think it has flown
backwards. Some of those engaged in egg-
laying cut strange capers on the pond's surface as they
continuously dip the tips of their slender bodies below
the water, with each dip dropping an egg or two of their
thousands to their fate. Others, having ovipositors,
carefully bore holes in weeds for the eggs. The eccentric
water-dances are seen on serenely bright days, as clouds
quickly pack the sun-lovers off, to sulk and sleep among
the reeds: sleeping so soundly that they may not stir
to a hand-touch.

AUGUST





11.

AUGUST

A YOUNG Man of fierce and Cholerick aspect, in a Flame-coloured Garment; upon his Head a garland of Wheat and Rye, upon his Arm a Basket of all manner of ripe Fruits, at his belt a Sickle, His Sign *Virgo*.

MATINS AND EVENSONG

AFTER a tropical day and night, with no healing "cool of the evening," a perfect hour comes at last with cockcrow. The light is quiet and grey at the opening of this ritual, and the cool air vibrates with melody. Robin is the first singer to rival the hedge-cricket; his warble suggests an Autumn morning. A thrush utters a few phrases next, and then loud and clear rings out the wren's morning hymn, every note true, the trill perfect; at intervals of a few seconds, he sings his hymn ten times. Rooks drift over the fields, to settle in an elm, there to caw forth their grace before breakfast. At an immense

height, against a rosy cloud, some small gnat-like specks may be made out—a band of swifts at their revels of dawn.

RAIN after drought turns the earth into a new heaven for myriads of thirsty creatures by reason of the reappearance of worms; they have rejoiced in the showers no less than the moles and birds so long denied a wormy feast. Thrushes have terrible struggles in rearing their young, and those are fortunate who find out the dormitories of æstivating snails. Robins often seem unequal to rearing second broods. Soft rains appear to turn the swallows' heads with joy. There is something human in the ecstasy of a band of swallows and martins, a hundred strong, as they skim above the surface of a river reach, while an early morning rain falls like a blessing, and their eager calls tell how they rejoice in the abundant insect food. In the West Country they have a beautiful name for such a refreshing shower—"The Pride of the Morning."

As twilight deepens over the river, and the birds are at their evensongs, there floats upstream the sound of a faint whistle. Nobody would heed it save an angler, or some other quiet, still body. It is a peculiar whistle, not bird-like and not quite human; and it carries a message from the osiers to the trout which till now have been rising freely: they rise no more. Another whistle, a rustle of reeds, a swirl of dark waters, and then a long, shadowy form glides up mid-stream. Two shadows follow; mother otter has come to the pool to

HARVEST - TIDE

give her cubs their evening hour of play. Their play is one of the prettiest of all wild animal pictures we may hope to see. The pool is rippled all over as the otters dart about the surface, and running swirls show where their smooth, dark bodies are flashing beneath, to rise and leap and frolic, and then float downstream contentedly, with the tips of their rudders just above water. The mother shows them how to dive in circles, so as to come up behind sleeping fish. After their play, the party heads downstream for the feeding-place.

HARVEST - TIDE

THERE are divers little pictures of corn-harvesting seen only when evening peace has settled over *The Fox in the fields*. One is that of rabbits stealing *the Corn* out of the standing corn, in a field partly reaped, for an evening meal and gambol. Suddenly a quiet observer may note that every rabbit of one side of the crop has bolted back to cover; on the other side some are sitting up to listen. Nothing unusual is to be heard; but just within the jungle of the stems is an ominous red-brown shadow. A fox is working through the corn, up-wind. When only a few stalks separate him from the nearest rabbit, perhaps three yards away, he crouches for his spring. He may not take the near rabbit; but we may be sure the one taken out of scores is the one he fancies most for supper.

THE corn-bunting comes to the fore with harvesting, and once again we are impressed by his singular

Bird of Harvest character. He is so strangely lacking in the bird-graces, and is such a picture of indolence as he sits for long, idle spells on the cornfield's hedge. When he flies, on an undulating course, with a whirr of wings, the wing-beats are laboured and intermittent, as if he will not make one more than necessary, and the lazy effect is heightened by the way the legs hang down. He seems even bored by his own song; beginning it vigorously, he soon ends it in a confused medley, as if many notes were uttered at once. Yet we like the bunting. He seems to take such a languorous joy in sunshine, and somehow his splintered notes are in pleasing harmony with sun-drenched cornfields.

An All-round Mouse THE nimble little harvest mouse seems to deserve better luck than it has in this life, for it is among the most capable of beasts—an expert nest-builder, a gymnast that can run down a corn-stem with the help of its grasping tail, a skilled fly-fisher—withal a thrifty character with a habit of storing grain. Then it is fortunate in finding winter harbourage in stacks. It is little in our thoughts in winter or, indeed, in summer either, since it is so small and swift that it escapes notice, in spite of the bright fawn of its topcoat. But now and then it is found in winter, asleep in a bird's nest. There is evidence that at times the mice will make homes for themselves, as they have been found sleeping among reeds in warbler-like nests cunningly placed at a height safe from rising waters.

To many beside gamekeepers there is a deep interest in

MUIR FOWL

The watching the eviction of the cornfield's
Miniature summer guests as the reapers make their
Partridge rounds. This week, from a south country
field, the harvesters, some onlookers, and a
watchful gamekeeper were surprised to see a quail head
away before the machine. The bird was very taking to
the eye, "as purty as a partridge," as one man said: in
many ways it is a miniature partridge. The decrease of
quail in this country (though in some seasons it is more
abundant than in others) is put down to the bird-netters
of Southern Europe.

AN old idea among country folk is that the yellow
hammer sings loudest in the afternoon,
Afternoon about three and four o'clock. While young
Songs grouse now face the music of the butts,
young partridges are about to come of
age, and young swifts set sail overseas, the yellow
hammer still has helpless young, or hopefully sits on
eggs, being one of our latest nesters, though beginning
betimes. This may account for it singing on through
August by the hour together. Its monotonous chant is
a fitting accompaniment to the drowsy heat of a corn-
field in the afternoon, when the harvesters rest in the
hedge for the refreshment known as "fourses."

MUIR FOWL

GROUSE, crouching in heather, mingle so magically
with the stems and blooms that a stranger
The on the fells fails to see one close at hand.
Bonnie But the moorland keeper's trained eyes
Muir-hen detect birds at a distance—by the least

movement of a head or the glow of a comb; one old keeper, asked to explain, in the name of all things wonderful, how he saw the distant birds, would say: "Why, sir, I just kenned the turn of his nob," or, "I kenned the red on his kame." It is the sheen of the feathers among the bells which takes the seeing eye, as Bobbie Burns knew when he sang of Phœbus, jealous of the bonnie muir-hen's plumage, taking a shot at her:

He levell'd his rays where she bask'd on the brae—
His rays were outshone, and but mark'd where she
lay.

"THE Twentieth" usually finds young blackgame hardly bigger than quail, and cocks hardly *Blackcock* to be distinguished from hens, the young *and* resembling their sober-hued mother. When *Greyhen* grown, no British birds are more strikingly different as to plumage of cocks and hens.

It will be mid-September before the young blackcock comes into his strength, and takes pride in his spreading tail. When fully developed, with his blue-black plumage, lyre-shaped tail, white-barred wings, and scarlet eyebrows, he is smartly arrayed indeed for the admiration of the plain brown hens.

THE mellow call-note of the curlew, "quoi, quoi," is now heard again on coasts whence they *The* departed in April, to nest on moor and fell. *Curlew's* The wary birds, the noisiest of wildfowl, *Vocabulary* constantly exchange cautionary notes, and have fully a dozen variations of their commonest call, the wild, musical whistle suggesting their

SEA THOUGHTS

name. The wild-fowler knows from their cries how the birds are occupied, distinguishing alarm-notes from those of satisfaction, anger, or excitement over treasure trove. One old-time punt-gunner speaks of the uproar made by a suddenly startled flock of curlew as an outrage on the decencies of the night—it spreads the alarm for miles across the mud-flats.

SEA THOUGHTS

FEW save mariners know that nomad of the seas, the stormy petrel, for when he does come to
Mother some of our lonely shores to make a nest
Carey's he proves himself a fly-by-night. This is
Chickens the midget of sea birds. Mariners say that scarcely a day passes in any sea without bringing its petrels to view. They dance as happily under the crest of the wildest waves as they skim over the glassy surface of an equatorial ocean, stretching down one slender foot after another the while, as if walking on water. And they seem to fly for ever without tiring, by day and night, hovering to feed on the wing. In the days of the wind-jammers they were famed for the faithful way they followed one ship, in storm and calm, giving comfort to the mariners, being birds of good omen.

GAYEST of all flowers of the beach is the horned poppy (so called from its foot-long pods) now
The flaunting its golden, crumpled petals as near
Seaside the sea as it dare venture, making splashes
Poppy of sunshiny colour on pebbly shores and cliffs. For five Summer months it keeps its

blossoms; gales scatter its gold, but fresh blooms rapidly succeed the fallen. The thick, leathery leaves are typical of what botanists mean by glaucous: blue-grey, or sea-green, they endure through Winter. The peculiar hue gave the botanical name "Glaucium," which possibly enshrines the memory of the Bœotian fisherman who turned into a sea-god.

THE DOWNS SO FREE

DAINTIEST of bell-flowers are the harebells, the blue-bells of Scotland, now ringing their silent *August's* chimes on the downs. They were ever *Bluebells* favourites with poets; Clare, the Northamptonshire bard, spoke lovingly of these "Little bell-flowers, pearly blue, that trembling peep." Among other wild campanulas the nettle-leaved bell-flower, throatwort of old, is abundant to-day in hillside woods, the true original Canterbury bell. Most exquisitely delicate is the ivy-leaved bell-flower, a fairy, azure gem of mountain bogs, a lover of the spring which loves the ravine haunted by the ring-ouzel, and those water-sprites, the dipper and the grey wagtail.

ON Juniper Hill, on the North Downs, the silvery-green berries of its junipers now make a *The Gin* goodly show, but it will be a year before *Tree* they take on their blue-black hue; ripe berries among them are last year's crop. Our juniper, though it may grow to be twenty feet high, is not the Biblical shade-giving juniper, the name having been given to a sort of broom of the wilderness. A wealth of other lore clings about it, as that the

THE PASSING OF SUMMER

fragrant wood, when burnt, " driveth away all noisome serpents," while the berries taken in wine are good for adder bites. Juniper stands, of course, for gin, a word derived from the French for the shrub, " genièvre," and the French brew a cordial from juniper berries and barley.

A WOODLANDER

AN alarming-looking insect is *Sirex gigas*, the giant-tailed wasp, now abroad in woodlands; a
A Super super wasp, with a thick body an inch and
Wasp a half long, and, if a female, with what looks like a mammoth sting projecting for another half-inch—the ovipositor. It wears the wasp's colours, yellow banded with black; its huge eyes are like black beads; its transparent wings are of old-gold; and it lacks the wasp's waist. The ovipositor is a wonderful compound instrument, toothed to act as a file for boring holes in trees for the eggs; it will even pierce lead. A fearsome insect: but it is without any power to sting.

THE PASSING OF SUMMER

A FORGOTTEN festival, highly honoured of old at this season, was rush-gathering for lights and
Green many other purposes; the poet Clare pic-
Grow the tured himself kneeling with the shepherd's
Rushes O! boy on a bed of rushes, plaiting and muttering nameless songs. Botanists note a score of species of rushes of marsh, sea, heath and wood; the wood-rushes having the name " *Luzula*," perhaps from

the Italian "lucciola," a glow-worm, the flowers sparkling so brightly when wet with dew. The giant of the tribe is the great sea-rush of Western coasts, with leaves so sharp that they cut the hand, and flying insects are impaled on the points.

How many people, not being of Devonshire, could translate this passage of dialect from a
Rustic Devonshire book?—"Aye, zure; and her,
Fruit leaning over the hatch, look'd delighted to
Names zee es, and wid always dole out something—
 a tetty o' rosen, or ripe deberries, christ-
 lings, or mazzards, or crumplings." A tetty is a nosegay; deberries are gooseberries, and the other names stand for plums, cherries and small apples. From Devonshire come some of the quaintest rustic names for apples: from pigs'-noses, flesh-and-blood, sweet-ladens, bitter-sweets, buff-coats, winter wardens, and leather-hides (a name known to Shakespeare) to varpneys (four-a-penny).

SPLendid shows of sunflowers to-day remind one that their heads, dried and well-saved, make
Lure for attractive lures to titmice if set up on sticks
Tomtits in winter. The way the little tits dart at the great discs reminds one of arrows in flight for a target. A sparrow or finch may settle on the head for a steady feast, and make demonstrations against the tits, but by their dash and quickness the little blue birds gain their share of the seeds. The sunflower has an old name, Turnsole, from the idea that it turns with the sun, turning on its god, as Moore sang, the same look when he sets as when he rises.

THE PASSING OF SUMMER

THE time of dahlias being at hand, the gardener sets his traps for earwigs, with little heed of the
Mother mother earwig's need of his dahlia petals
Earwig for food for her young, or of her devotion
in climbing the tall stalks with the intention
of converting the petals into a kind of dahlia porridge.
She is credited with all a hen's solicitude for her chicks.
Laying the eggs near a plant about to blossom, the earwig sits on the clutch, hatches a score or more of white offspring, and broods over them with the devotion of a partridge. She warns them of danger by striking the ground with her antennæ, as the rabbit thumps with its hind legs. The garden robin, by the way, is a mighty earwig hunter.

Now with treble soft, "The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft"—for the week has brought
Robin's us to the opening of the robin's autumn
Autumn song-season. He sings quietly to-day, often
Ode in an undertone; it is as if a flute-player, after an illness, should reach his hand for the flute not touched for many weeks, to try over a few notes. Robin has been feeling sorry for himself, and has been skulking in hiding, while moulting. Though he is back in his old garden haunt, times are still anxious; his young grow apace, though some have yet to sport red waistcoats. They must be placed in the world, and may show fight before he can regain his old prerogatives as cock of the garden walk.

A FAMILIAR moth of the day, a haunter of gardens and houses, is the magpie, a moth of dauntless spirit; though

Moths a day-flier, it seems to find protection from
Like Birds the birds in its black-and-white motley,
 as does its caterpillar, that arch lover of
 currant leaves. The magpie is remarkable in keeping the
 same colour-scheme when a moth as in earlier stages of
 life, as though it could wish for no better protective
 arrangement. We have one moth which not only has
 bird-like markings, but suggests a bird's form, the
 Emperor moth of the moors, which, when seated on
 its heathery throne, wears a curious look of an owl. The
 curved and plump body suggests an aggressive beak,
 which may well scare the birds.

THE affairs of a pair of swallows which nested half-way
 down the open chimney of a village inn
The have been watched with mild interest by
Chimney the village toppers. Nowadays it is rare to
Swallows find swallows entitled to their old-time
 name, "chimney swallows." Possibly these
 birds are descendants of a pair which built in the same
 risky site a hundred years ago. The young birds have
 joined forces with others bred in the inn's outbuildings,
 and in a party a score strong spend idle morning hours
 basking on the inn roof, where their parents also rest,
 with much joyous warbling, for long spells, as if con-
 serving strength for a voyage in prospect.

THE swallows, now beginning to congregate, know only
 one bird of prey which has the habit of
The hunting them in this country, our rare little
Swallows' summer visitor, the hobby. Though mar-
One vellously fast, he has no easy task in hawk-
Enemy ing swallows, though they may be gathered

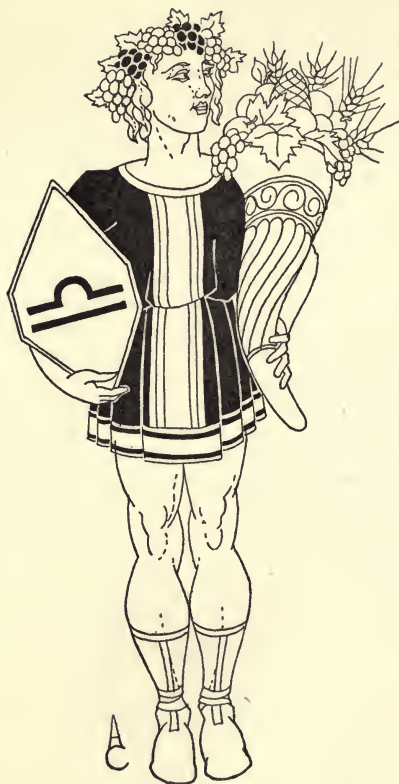
THE PASSING OF SUMMER

in thousands. The pack rises; the falcon circles higher, till almost out of sight; but though he then swoops like a meteor, he may have to rise and swoop several times before striking. One gamekeeper has a story of a hobby taking a swift which yet managed to escape its talons, and though hotly pursued, and swooped upon time after time, made good its escape.

GOING—going—gone! is the order of the day with the swifts. Their flashing forms, on their scythe-shaped wings, and their wild screeches, are always much missed when they disappear, in the dim dawn of an early August day, from thatched cottage eaves of village streets. The cottagers' cats must miss them, too; cats that may have spent half the summer hoping to capture a swift on the wing as it almost brushes the ground on entering a low nest. Gilbert White remarked that the cats of Selborne sometimes succeeded in this ambition. Alas! that summer goes on the swifts' sooty wings.



12.





13.

SEPTEMBER

A MERRY and cheerful Countenance, in a Purple Robe, upon his Head a Wreath of red and white Grapes, in his Left hand a handful of Oats, withall carrying a Horn of Plenty, full of all manner of ripe Fruits, in his Right hand the Sign *Libra*.

THOUGHTS ON HUNTING

“ THE First ” has brought again that familiar sound of autumn evenings in the country, the uneasy, melancholy calling of the partridges after being dismayed and scattered by gunfire; and the familiar picture of unwontedly agitated birds roaming the fields, seeking for the missing members of the covey. The search may go on long after twilight, as the calling testifies: “ Perdix—Perdix!” that rasping cry, so well likened to a rusty key turning in a lock. Search parties may be organized, some of a covey hunting the turnips, while others call in the stubbles. The covey which has suffered heavily doubtless seeks consolation by joining forces with another.

THE cock partridge is supposed to be distinguished from the hen by a brighter "horseshoe" of chocolate on the breast; but hens may sport this badge. The expert distinguishes the sexes by differences in the wing-covers, a chestnut touch on the cock's feathers, and cross-bars of buff on the hen's, lacking in her mate's plumage. Now and then white horseshoe badges are seen, and black ones are worn by the species from Asia (the bearded partridge), which comes in ice to our markets. Then we have a "mountain partridge," a plain bird in red and buff. Birds of the year are easily distinguished by the badge of their yellow legs.

SPORTSMEN usually held that when a covey of partridges rises, the admirable cock parent goes first: and is likely to fall first. When the covey goes to "jug" in some dry hollow in mid-field the cock keeps sentinel with never-failing vigilance. The birds may be in a wide circle, each apart from its neighbour, but in cold weather twenty will huddle on a spot a yard in diameter, those on the edge breast outwards. When there is an alarm, clear above the loud, sudden whirr of all wings is heard the parent cock's directing call.

THE French partridge is curiously limited in its range, favouring south-eastern England, and haunting waste places scorned by our brown birds. The way it prefers running to flying has forfeited some respect, and the gourmet says it lacks the flavour of the common partridge. Like other foreign red-legs, it is distinguished

THOUGHTS ON HUNTING

from our native birds by its call. Possibly some other foreign partridges, like the Greek red-leg, might thrive in this climate, and we could hardly have too many of a family which deserves more than the qualified praise of the old couplet:

If partridge had the woodcock's thigh,
'Twould be the best bird that e'er did fly.

WE have sympathy for the pheasants, partridges and hares (if little for foxes) when deprived of *Gleaners* sanctuary by harvesting, but a multitude of creatures benefit, the ultimate gleaners of the fallen grain. The woman gleaner has passed from the picture, and the birds are left undisturbed in the stubbles. Flocks of sparrows—many of them Cockneys—and other finches there find an easy living. Pheasants draw out from the woods for the grain, and partridges come from the roots. At night is heard the voice of many another picker-up of unconsidered trifles, the wood-owl hooting melodiously, and the little owl making all manner of weird, excited noises, as they enjoy in the stubbles their best rat- and mouse-hunting of the year.

IN September, blackgame become attractive to the sportsman over the Border. After long *Black-Game* days among the grouse he enjoys the change from the unvarying leagues of purple heather of the moor to rambling up some wild, rocky glen, where a hill-burn has cut a tortuous ravine, the sides overgrown with heather, bracken, and birch, the favourite haunt of young blackgame. The

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

blackcock, with his blue-black plumage, white wing-bars, scarlet wattles, and lyre-shaped tail, is perhaps the handsomest of our game-birds. He takes a long time—from early June till mid-September—to mature, and through the summer is the tamest of game-birds; but later he becomes one of the wildest. In a mild autumn he may be obsessed by amatory ardour, fantastically dancing before the hens, his fine tail expanded, and wings trailing, as if courting days had come.

THE cub-hunting season has opened, and already some cubs have proved themselves stout foxes.

Cubbing For the cubs, as for hound-puppies and
Days young hunters, a hard schooling begins.

The cubs have a short time for learning all about the realities of a fox's life, since by November they must rank as grown foxes. Gone are the glorious days in the cornfields, with game on all sides. The family begins to break up, instead of lying together in the coverts at night, dreaming of the roosting long-tails; though echoing barks show that the cubs may keep touch until finally scattered by hounds.

HARVEST-HOME

ALL good country people go to harvest festival. Many who attend are rarely seen in church; if the

Harvest gamekeeper is present so also is the
Festival poacher. Harvest decorations appeal to all;

the great sheaves of corn in the chancel, the apples on the window ledges, that set the choir-boys' mouths watering, the giant marrows, and loaves about the font, the garlands of travellers'-joy that festoon the

SEPTEMBER BIRDS

oak gallery, and the scarlet dahlias that so finely set off parson's surplice as he mounts the pulpit. All sing the old hymns of harvest-home with lusty goodwill. The preacher's favourite text, as is well known, is from Habakkuk, and his discourse is familiar, but he touches all hearts anew.

SEPTEMBER BIRDS

THE turtle-dove has slipped away overseas, but we may still hear the wood-pigeons uttering their plaintive songs, and they come more into evidence as the year wanes and the Continental flocks come in. A wandering tribe, they are here to-day among the beechmast and gone to-morrow to a place of acorns, a stubble, a clover-lea, or turnip-field. The feeding pack makes an amusing spectacle, as the rear rank birds continually fly forward to a front place, so that the whole seems on the move, save for the hedge-sentries. Pitching into their roosting-place from the skies, flight following flight, always flying into the wind, the pigeons make attractive targets to the sportsman. They are marvellously vigilant; at night in the wood we have put them out of the trees by the striking of a match, and the crack of a twig seems to mean to them as much as gun-fire.

A CHARMING bird-note of Autumn is the reappearance of many feathered friends long lost to sight, family cares and moulting trials having sent them into mysterious retirement. The blackbird comes boldly from the shrubbery where he has been skulking, in his Black-

foot Indian way. The robin settles for the winter at the sign of the garden croft. Blue tits, growing daily more yellow and blue, begin again to patronize the sign of the swinging coconut. After long silence it is touching to hear a revival of the willow-wren's song, that little grace he offers up before slipping overseas. Sportsmen, going out after partridges on some lonely sheep-walk, encounter the mistle-thrushes that nested in their orchards, their roaming bands feasting heartily to-day at the sign of the hawthorn bush.

As Autumn waxes many birds have a way of attracting our special attention, having been somewhat lost to sight in the crowded summer days; thus the bullfinch is now conspicuous as it haunts the wayside hedge, searching for dock-seeds and fruits, showing a special weakness for privet berries. Migratory bullfinches come in to swell the numbers of this most handsome species, so musical in voice and so engaging in manner. Unlike their tribe in general, it is rare to find more than a pair of bullfinches together. And no finch is more deeply devoted to his mate than Bully: all through the Winter they are inseparable.

WHERE a family of seven swallows settled in July on a sunny barn-roof near a village, their age-old trysting place, three to four hundred now gather of a morning, filling the air with their warbling. All will fly as one on what can only be a joy-flight, rising to an immense height, as if hopefully looking for the sea. Other flights are from fear. Every swallow on the roof takes instantly to

SEPTEMBER BIRDS

wing when there rings out from above the farm the shrill, petulant cry of a kestrel. It was only extracted from the innocent mouse-hunter by the bullying of the farmyard pigeons. But the swallows take no chance of being prevented from sailing on their holiday.

THE flight of the wagtail is so erratic as to suggest it cares not where it goes. We may suppose
The that the wagtails which now emigrate may
Wayward be surprised to find themselves at sea;
Wagtail others may wonder why they never see foreign lands. As day by day Peggy Dishwasher dances waywardly about some sunny stable-yard, or acts the part of a lily-pond's nymph, or of sprite on a lawn, it gives us a remarkable example of a bird disdaining, or perhaps forgetting, to follow the general custom of its kind. Another strange example is the unsociable starling, which is content to whistle from a chimney-pot the Autumn through though its brethren flock after adventures.

THIS month the little Jack snipe comes faithfully back —all things having gone well with it
The Deaf through the Summer in Northern Europe
Snipe —to the self-same clump of rushes which gave it shelter in the water-meadow last Winter. The French call it "the deaf snipe," from the way it lies low if danger threatens, so that it may almost be trodden underfoot before it rises, to flit off on butterfly-like flight—and to drop unexpectedly just when the sportsman thinks it has reached a fair distance for a shot. The classical story of the Jack snipe tells how

a solitary bird gave an Irishman all his sport every season for years.

SEPTEMBER'S FLOWERS

AMONG the surprising flowers which choose to bloom in September is the dainty orchis, the autumnal *Lady's Tresses*, a new arrival on the downs, among the harebells, the eyebrights, and other remnants of Summer's flora. A peculiarity of the plant is that its leaves do not appear until the flowers begin to expand. In the evening, the minute, white, waxy flowers, but a fraction of an inch in diameter, are fragrant. The plant takes its name from the way the flowers rise spirally up the stem (the direction of the spiral varying in different specimens), and suggest the flowing waves of plaited hair.

WHERE there were anemones in April, giant teasels now rear their flower-heads six feet high, and *The Teazel's Trap* the moats formed by their splendid leaves catch and drown the flies and caterpillars, that have ventured into the trap. The least showers, and dews in time of drought, fill the cups which the leaves form as they clasp the stem, and they have a fatal attraction for insects. The teazel is as bold and defiant as the anemones were lowly and humble, and bristles with spines which defend the stems, and make a terrible array along the midribs of the lance-shaped leaves, while the spiny fine-pointed bracts curve gracefully upwards until they overtop the flower-head they guard, with its curious circular bands of lilac blossoms. This plant is Venus's

SEPTEMBER'S FLOWERS

Basin, and the rustic beauty who bathes her face in its waters is safe from warts and freckles.

ONE of the brightest small flowers of the day is eye-bright, whose fresh look, as it grows in clumps on chalk hills, seems to belie the passing of Summer. The minute white flowers are flecked with rose and purple, and with one daring yellow spot for the eye's pupil. At the least touch the plant comes up in the hand from the down turf: for it is a parasite. Certainly it brightens the pilgrim's eye, and deserves to be named from Euphrosyne. It was with eyebright, according to Milton, that the archangel, Michael, gave Adam a seeing eye; and Culpeper said that if it were used commonly as an eye-lotion, it would go far to ruin the spectacle-makers.

PERHAPS our most adventurous wild-flower is the humble shepherd's purse, which blossoms all the year round, and seems to make its fortune wherever it goes. Some of its country names enshrine the idea that it is a roguish vagabond. The heart-shaped pods gave it the tragic name, "Pick-your-mother's-heart-out," and "Pick-purse," but a name to its credit is "Poor Man's Parmecetie," hinting at healing virtues, for which it was extolled highly by George Herbert in his "Country Parson," as it yields a medicine "easy for the parson's purse." It has followed civilization into all temperate regions of the earth, to seize, in the spirit which builds empires, every spot which man tills.

FLY-BY-NIGHTS

WHEN we light our candle in the evening Daddy Long-legs now comes blundering to the flame, an engaging creature causing amusement by his stilt-like legs. His appearance on the Autumn scene is heartily welcomed by sparrows and others, including the lordly cock pheasant, who cuts a ludicrous figure by eagerly darting after the elusive tit-bit. If Daddy be viewed through a magnifying glass, a quiet beauty is revealed in the slender, tapering brown body, the gauzy wings, the exquisite antennæ, and the immense eyes. But it is a comical sight to see the female laying her countless eggs in the grass, performing her stilt-like dance the while. The pestilential leather-jackets that hatch out become a favourite fare of the rooks, who, by their destruction, earn more thanks than some farmers give.

TYPICAL moths of Autumn have none of the mid-Summer glory of the red admiral butterfly, but wear Autumn's colours, in harmony with the flotsam and jetsam of the Fall; mimicking faded leaves, and decaying wood wherein they may hide for the winter. The drab noctuæ, which feed on ivy-blossom, are much alike in their greys and browns, and, except for opal-gleaming eyes at night, would easily escape notice. At the fall of the leaf comes a typical Autumn moth, the mottled umber, in a brown and buff dress of subdued beauty. The wingless female looks more like a spider than a moth as she sits on a tree-trunk, luring her late-flying lovers.

DOOMSDAY

DOOMSDAY

WASPS begin to grow sleepy, and may sting us as they
lurk drowsily in unexpected hiding-places.

Last Days of Wasps The young queens, who have contributed
nothing to the welfare of the colony, and
have lived luxuriously, feeding and being

fed, have mated with their chosen princes among the
idle drones, and now go into retreat; hanging by their
jaws to some such support as the straw of a thatched
roof, with legs and wings folded entering the blessed
state of dormancy. The old queen, the mother of
thousands, dies as Winter comes on, and the workers
slay the larvæ, in the cells of their crumbling home, as
their last act in life.

THERE is much to charm us in the nature of *Bombus*, the
humble-bee; as was made clear when a little

The Humble- girl was discovered in a garden trying to
imprint a kiss on a drowsy bee's furry coat.

Bee's End She is a long-suffering and patient creature,
and has a pleasant way of humming songs

to herself as she flies. Her days are numbered, and we
mark the patience with which she waits her end.
Bombus, feeling drowsy one evening, is too lazy to
leave her floral tavern, and dies in her dreams.

BOMBUS is inflicted with just such a cuckoo as makes a
dupe of the hedge-sparrow; but the cuckoo-

The Bee's Cuckoo bee goes farther in deception than the
cuckoo-bird, in appearance mimicking its

host. There is the difference that the
humble-bee carries on its thighs hairy baskets for

pollen, but the parasites have no baskets, as they have no need of pollen, for their offspring. The cuckoo-bee, moreover, having found a humble-bee's nest in a hedge-bank, may kill the queen-mother in occupation. Then, with stolen wax, it makes cells, and lays eggs, whose grubs the workers of the colony will feed.

THE KEEPER'S CARES

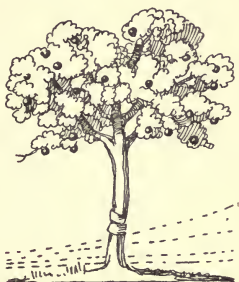
A WET September brings anxious days to the game-keeper, whose heart is with his pheasants.

The Bird of Next Month They are fast losing their sanctuary in the corn, and if, on coming in to the coverts, they find them dripping with moisture, the ground sodden, they are likely to seek other quarters. They are always particular about keeping their plumage dry, and when once they go into the open to air their feathers, may take much longer walks than pleases the keeper of a small manor. Wandering on along the hedgerows, springing up after blackberries, or pursuing that arch clod-hopper, daddy-longlegs, they pass unawares over the boundary, where another game-keeper may be eager to make them welcome.

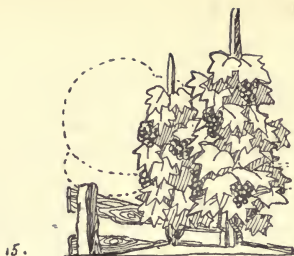
As September passes, the pheasant broods begin to break up, and the young birds cut their apron-strings, deserting their mothers. The *Winning Their Spurs* young cocks' feathers begin to shine; they feel themselves fine fellows, and challenge one another to duels. The plaintive "Peep-peep" note of infancy changes to a croaking "Cock-up," as different from the veteran cocks' ringing crows as the treble caw of a nestling rook from the parents'

THE KEEPER'S CARES

solemn bass. In these Autumn days the cocks tend to keep much together, and so remain until March, and the veterans no doubt now give the youngsters some advanced lessons in the use of their wings, legs and spurs.







OCTOBER

IN a Garment of Yellow and Carnation, upon his Head a garland of Oak-leaves with Akorns, in his Right hand the Sign *Scorpio*, in his Left hand a Basket of Medlars, Services, and Chestnuts; and any other Fruits then in Season.

ARTFUL DODGERS

THE first day of October brings a thought for the pheasants; and the bird of the day is the *October's Bird* wily old wild-bred cock, after whom a few may go in pursuit—as when he inhabits some lonely, outlying spinney at the mercy of poachers. It is certain that he will grow ever more wary as the season advances. Old boundary hedges are a favourite haunt to-day, where he still enjoys the blackberry season; and isolated copses, reed-beds, or any wild, rough ground. He will run a mile before taking wing, and is full of tricks; if cornered, he has a magic way of disappearing, by squatting, or putting a

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

tree-trunk between himself and the guns. A lordly old cock, with emerald neck and burnished collar and jewelled breast shining in the October sun, as he swaggers about a clearing where acorns are to be picked up, is surely the most brilliant of British birds.

HOUNDS and horseman, a gallant company, disturbed the early-morning nap of an old red fox. *The Wily One* Maybe he knew well enough that his cubs were the rightful quarry of cub-hunters, and that several weeks of grace were his due before real hunting began. But he was too old to take any chances; he was up and off like a red streak at the moment he awoke, heading down a long, straight narrow ride, with a hedge at one end, and open country beyond. Fast as he went away, they pressed him hard; and suddenly he changed his mind. Just short of the hedge a side-leap took him into the thick stuff. He sneaked round a great clump of bramble, and lay low. Hounds crashed past, and took the hedge; as the last stern went over, there was one person who saw how the old fox stole back by the way he had come—perhaps to finish his nap.

SONGS AND REVELS

DAWN, on summery October days, is greeted by a chorus of bird song that is like an echo of *The* Spring. The robins now form the main *October* choir, as did the blackbirds in May; every *Chorus* cock robin of the countryside sings his sweetest as day breaks. In the hour after sunrise the rooks visit their nest-trees, and set up a

babel of cawing before deciding where to breakfast, and several foolish pairs pretend to repair their nests. Then the thrush sings, his ringing notes taking the mind back to the days of white violets. A chiffchaff cries his two notes with the zest of a March day. Over a stubble the larks course and court, soar and sing in rivalry. And in a walnut-tree a band of starlings greets the day with mysterious incantations, warbling and whistling in chorus for an hour on end.

IN a land of farms, like Essex, we may walk for miles across country by following little tracks by
Sentries the hedgerows, and to do so is to realize
of the the marvellous abundance of bird life in
Hedge Autumn. All the way you hear eager alarm-
 notes, and the rustling of affrighted wings,
 like the noise of wind in a poplar tree, as the flocks of sparrows and finches, titmice and many others drift away down the hedge before you. The blackbird is sentinel-in-chief, well supported by the wary mistle-thrush, who flies from the hawthorn with harshly-grating notes of annoyance; wrens scold at you for a trespasser, jays screech in execration, and that ever-vigilant sentry, the little owl, barks like a watch-dog. Only the larks, if you put them up as you take a path across a stubble, greet you with a song; but this may be in the nature of a battle-cry.

PROTECTIVE measures for goldfinches seem to have borne fruit, and merry-hearted flocks make
Proud a typical picture of the season as they quest
Tailor eternally for thistle-seeds. They have peculiar claims for protection, because of

their good work in eating weed seeds, and they seem to fall an easy prey to their foes, to garden cats, and to sparrow-hawks. It is another misfortune of the goldfinch that he is a favourite cage-bird, because of his silvery voice and golden wings. A cock goldfinch seems to be well aware of the glory of his wings, when in courting days he stretches them out, fanwise, just far enough to show off the golden bars, like a tailor displaying the gorgeous pattern of a cloth—whence, perhaps, his old name, Proud Tailor.

BEECHES with ripe beechmast now become scenes of high revels. The brown and orange canopy of the leaves may hide from view every one of a great flock of feasting wood-pigeons. *Beech-Tree* *Revellers* On a dry twig snapping, it is then startling to hear a hundred pigeons crashing forth on loud-clapping wings. The babel is too much for the nerves of the timorous squirrels who have been feeding respectfully on the ground, and all make helter-skelter for the tree-trunks. Their one idea is to cheat intruders' eyes by keeping still. After one spring from the ground, as the sharp claws of the outspread feet take hold of the trunk, the squirrel stays fast, spread-eaglewise, anxiously peering over his shoulder, and as motionless as any lamented ancestor, stuffed and mounted in a glass case. With the next spring—made perhaps ten minutes later—he puts the tree-trunk between the enemy and his nobility.

THIS merry forester, the squirrel, seems to feast all day now, as if intent on fattening himself against winter

SPORTING WAYS AND DAYS

The Squirrel's Day sleep; or he is busy in storing provender in mysterious corners. Squirrels are wonderfully faithful to favoured haunts, and there are woodland glades where one may always see a few at their revels at this season, six or seven of the bright-eyed creatures, frisking and feasting in jovial company. They are always in a hurry, as they skurry amid the fallen leaves, or gnaw at nuts, sitting on their haunches, with tails upstanding and hands to mouths. In some hollow of a beech's roots the larder may be found, stored with beechmast, chestnuts, fir-cones, acorns, hazel-nuts, and hips and haws; certainly the squirrel is a forester, for he plants many trees.

SPORTING WAYS AND DAYS

IN our fathers' day the upland forest country of Sussex was a home for blackgame, and famous for *Snaring Woodcock* woodcock. The season for 'cock now being at hand, we may recall that they were commonly taken by poachers in springes, which have been in use in Sussex for centuries, and are still set occasionally for pheasants. The springe is made by bending down any flexible wand which grows at the chosen place, or one cut for the purpose, a simple, trigger-like arrangement keeping it bent like a bow. To the tip of the wand is fastened a length of string, with a running noose. On the woodcock running his head into the noose the trigger is released, the wand flies upright, and the bird is gibbeted, like a felon, in mid-air. On either side of the run herbage is woven, so as to " weir," as the poacher would say, the bird to the snare.

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

SPORTSMEN sometimes notice a remarkable point about woodcock—that when one is shot, having
A been flushed from some dell which always
Woodcock looks as if it would suit a woodcock for his
Mystery day-time dozing, another, within a day or two, takes possession of the same quarters.

Several birds like to keep solitary state in their own little realms in Winter and may have a very human envy of others' realms—certainly a garden corner, which is ideal in one robin's view, will be occupied eagerly by another if the chance comes. In days when it was thought no crime to shoot kingfishers on sight, the old school of sportsmen-naturalists often noted how one kingfisher would take a fallen bird's place, as mysteriously and as surely as a widowed cock sparrowhawk will attract a fresh bride. So anglers tell how a big trout, taken from a favoured hover, is succeeded by another, presumably the next in size and power.

THE little quail, that miniature partridge (though lacking the partridge's ideal of monogamy), is
Quails more familiar in game-dealers' stores in town in Winter than as a dweller in our countrysides; but it has been observed wintering in the Isle of Wight, and in the course of what sportsmen knew of old, when the bird was plentiful, as a "Quail Year," it will linger through the Winter of our warm West country. Unfortunately the quail has a reputation as the most appealing of all game-birds to the gourmet. After harvesting-days, when consorting with partridges, and when put up in their company by the beaters, they have often been spared a shot from being mistaken for "squeakers." One of the quail's names

OWLS — AND OTHERS

well hits off its shrill, threefold call-note—"dactylisonans," and another classical name, "Coturnix," also suggests the sound of those pleasant notes of Spring. They are neatly rendered by the phrase, "Whet-my-lips."

OWLS — AND OTHERS

THE white owl is armed at every point as a night-hunter, with its great eyes, large ears, *Silent* deadly talons, and soft feathers that make *Wings* its flight as buoyant as thistle-down. There is no clapping of wings, no whirring. Man's sensitive ears may possibly hear the beating of some butterflies' wings; but the white owl flies as silently as a ghost. Even when it stoops to its prey it falls like a fluttering rose-petal. The silent flight is considered to be a provision of nature to prevent the mouse hearing; but it is as likely to provide against any noise which would interfere with the owl's own hearing.

THE dusk of an Autumn evening may find the barn-owl on the wing, quartering a field, in a slow *Mobbing* but in so certain a way that no mouse *the Owl* could hope to escape, or working up and down a hedgerow, missing nothing. The brown owl hunting by daylight is a rarer sight, and one most enraging to other birds. It is wonderful to see how quickly a crowd gathers to mob the owl after its first mellow halloo has rung out. The ever-gallant mistle-thrushes may be in the van of the attack, backed by screaming blackbirds, and a scolding rout of tits and finches, and they maintain an uproar even after the owl has

settled, while the little wren diligently sounds his watchman's rattle. The owl must regret waking up too early.

A REGULAR winter visitor is the short-eared owl, the "grass-owl" of the falconers, that has a marked habit of frequenting open fields, *Our* and there hunts and roosts. It hunts by *Winter* day as by night, and there is small hope for *Owl* any prey it attacks, furred, feathered, or scaly. The owls come to our east coast in small parties about twenty strong, which presently disperse, but before doing so are sometimes encountered, sitting in the open fields, by partridge shooters. They are fond of river meadows, such as are haunted by meadow-pipits, whom they seem to regard as excellent morsels off which to dine.

THE short-eared, owl the "Woodcock Owl," which comes in with the 'cock, and usually departs *Owls Like* in the days of white violets, is among the *Cherubim* long list of the foes of fieldmice and voles, which includes, besides owls of all sorts, buzzards, kestrels, and the small seagulls, foxes, stoats, weasels, rooks, crows, great black-backed gulls, ravens and adders. It is like the owl called "little" in that it hunts by day. A hunter of moors and fenlands, it squats close to the grass, and is sometimes flushed by shooters among turnips. A humorous sporting picture might be drawn from life—the dogs standing at point, and a surprised sportsman putting up, instead of the expected covey, a number of short-eared owls, which solemnly set sail, looking, in one sportsman's phrase, like the cherubim of churchyard tombstones.

AUTUMN TONES

THE buzzard is happily among our birds which have increased since the war, and its melancholy cry is now heard on the chalk hills of the home counties as from the cliffs of Cornwall. No doubt the bird was numerous of old in the great oak woods of Sussex, where it went by the name of "puttock." Its individuality is strongly marked. The flight, steady and sedate, is of proud and dignified sort; it seems to sail through the air, scarcely moving the wings. As it grandly soars, it gives an impression of size—it looms large like an eagle. It is very faithful to one haunt and to a favourite perch, where it sits motionless by the hour, dozing—or else waiting for the chance to swoop on a rabbit, rat, mouse, frog, mole or worm, in the stealthy, pouncing way of the owls. Its presence strikes a very wild note in any peaceful place it may haunt.

AUTUMN TONES

THE claret-hued leaves of elder-bushes strike a glowing Autumn colour-chord in hedgerows and in such jungles on chalk hills as where the badgers have their holts. The elder's history is a remarkable one, and goes back to dark ages when man found that the stems made a good tube for music-pipes. The name in many countries is derived from *Sambucus*, the ancient bagpipe of elder-stems, though it seems more probable that the tree would give its name to the instrument. Piers Plowman called it the "eller," a word derived from the Saxon for kindler, the stem serving for a blow-

pipe. Shakespeare referred to its pea-shooting uses:
 "That's a perilous shot out of an elder gunne."

IN a woodland glade that smells of Autumn, among
 dying bracken and verdant moss, is a
Toadstool cluster of the most gorgeous of toadstools,
Lore the fly agaric, in vivid scarlet cap. Some
 say that the man who eats it will pass from
 intoxication through delirium to death; others think
 its reputation has suffered unjustly from its having
 poisonous relatives, one of which is called the "des-
 troying angel." Near the agaric grows a tall parasol
 mushroom with a movable ring on its tall stalk; this
 has a good repute, and the fungophagist argues that the
 hollow left when the stem is pulled off was expressly
 intended by Nature for the insertion of a butterpat
 when the mushroom was a-frying.

WHERE bands of titmice go a-roving through the
 Autumn woods there is a chance of enjoy-
Sing ing the exceptional pleasure of identifying
Willow, a new British bird in the person of the
Tit Willow willow-tit. Some good authorities are of
 opinion that it is now becoming widely
 distributed, though it is little known, has a history only
 of some twenty-five years in this country, and is hardly
 to be distinguished from the marsh-tit. It is known by
 the dullness of its cap, the brownish hue of its flanks,
 and the sign of a curiously rounded tail. Quiet in habit,
 a study in greyish-brown (and quiet also in habits), it
 is in harmony with the shady, marshy woods it specially
 favours.

AUTUMN TONES

A SUDDEN outburst of Autumn song from a wren, ending with trilling notes, and ending most abruptly, seems to bid us take heart of grace, and to throw off such melancholy ideas as the pathetic whistling of the robin would persuade us are suited to the season. Two wrens in a garden will sing one against the other, in strophe and antistrophe; on one song culminating in its trill, the other begins so certainly that it sounds as if one bird were singing without pause. The wren is justly famed for singing in unexpected places and times, even at night or in snow-time, and sometimes when on the wing: now seeming to enjoy a duet, then to be testing its voice against a rival's.

THE mellow cawing of rooks on October mornings, as they visit their old nest-trees, or forage among walnut trees (their favourite tree-inns to-day), always seems in harmony with Autumn's mood; as does the pathos in the robin's song, and the inflected whistling of the chimney-pot's solitary starling. A note which often breaks the prevailing silence of "The Fall" is the call of the nut-hatch, a liquid "quit, quit, quit," which may be heard for twenty minutes on end in orchard and garden. A wise thrush may carol; linnets give evening concerts; but it is to the robin that we are more indebted for music than to all others; there seem to be robins singing on every hand throughout a countryside.

Rooks lose no chance of bullying the harmless kestrel, which easily evades their attacks, or of giving chase to

Rook a heron which may drift over their hunting-
Feuds grounds. Several rooks will make after the
 heron with a great turn of speed, easily
 overtaking their majestic quarry, flying above, below,
 and ahead, not attacking, but persistently herding him
 away. The feud between them seems almost traditional.
 Should a heron pass over a rookery, he will be attacked
 even more furiously, then may cry in alarm, lose his
 calm dignity, and throw himself into pitiful attitudes
 of distress. Rooks have been known to expel herons
 from their heronry; but the victory does not always go
 to the sable brotherhood.

BIRDS OF PASSAGE

IN Autumn we may have the good fortune to see rare
 birds on migration, birds unknown in our
A Bird own countryside. There may come to a
Simpleton valley of the South Downs a small flock,
 or trip, of those handsome and confiding
 little plovers, the dotterels, who chose to linger on the
 hills, their last barrier before the sea, on their way to
 the far south from the far north. To their unwariness
 they owe their name, from the word to dote—to be fond
 and simple—and their scientific name, “*morinellus*,”
 signifies a little dotard. The simpleton bird has paid
 dearly for his foolishness in allowing man to net and
 shoot him with ease, to make what our forefathers called
 “a daintie dish,” and to make trout-fishing flies of his
 feathers.

Now the last broods of the house-martins fly from the
 nests beneath our cottage eaves. For more than five

THE FALL

The Swallows Retire months, from mid-April, the cottage has been their parents' home. Their sweet, fleet forms will be sadly missed, and their music of the eaves, that mysterious, long-sustained warbling that comes from the nest, hour after hour. At night, it suggests a lullaby, as if the birds are crooning one another to sleep. They have flown on the first stage of their journey to Africa, to some deep valley of the South Downs, running seawards. To such valleys the swallows bred in the villages at the foot of the Downs have also retired, and there may be seen in some force, lingering on the verge of the sea, as if loath to leave this pleasant land.

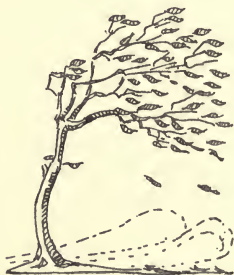
THE FALL

As Spring "comes slowly up our way," Autumn's victory over Summer is a long-drawn affair. A bouquet of Summer flowers may be picked to-day on the chalk downs, where harebells hold their own, or where a second crop of honeysuckle perfumes a hedge. Oak-woods cling long to their midsummer greenery, but Autumn gains an early and sweeping victory in the beech-woods, now turning to a foxy red; Autumn's torch will set half a wood ablaze in one night. The gales which followed the equinox have stripped some trees of leaves: those gales which are only to be expected before and after the halcyon days of St. Luke's Summer, and are not unwelcome in rustic weather-lore, as is suggested by the old toast to—

A good October and a good blast
To blow the hog acorn and mast.

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

A BREATH of Winter puts "Finis" to chapters innumerable of insect life, and in gardens *Ladybirds* and lanes we miss their teeming multitudes, and mourn for butterfly and bee. We may shed no tear over the passing of the wasp. Daddy-longlegs is an engaging creature, but we remember he springs from the pestilential leather-jacket. Rosarians and hop-growers, and all true lovers of roses and beer, will regret the vanishing of the pretty and ever-welcome ladybirds. Their life-work is mainly for the benefit of roses and hops, as alike in larval and perfect state they live on greenfly, mysteriously crossing the Channel to find their prey: Dover's cliffs have been painted scarlet by incoming swarms of these fairy-like beetles.



16.

NOVEMBER





N O V E M B E R

IN a Garment of Changeable Green and Black upon his Head, a garland of Olives with the Fruit in his Left hand, Bunches of Parsnips and Turnips in his Right. His Sign *Sagittarius*.

S O N G S O F C H E E R

As Winter comes on, the robin's pride of place in the garden becomes more and more distinguished. What happens in Winter to Cock
A
Crowing
Hen
 Robin's wife and family is always mysterious. The robins like to live hermitwise, each in its domain, couples separating, however faithfully mated. Some naturalists now state as a proven fact that the hen robin has an Amazonian nature, and fights, as well as her little swashbuckler of a lord, to defend her chosen territory, and will sing. The

quality of robins' songs varies much, and the feebler songs are now credited to the hens; who, it is believed, sing only in Winter, in challenge or in triumph after battle.

THE hedge-sparrow is the humblest of all song-birds.

He is always demure, gentle, and homely,
Winter alike as to his song and his manner of life.
Cheer If he haunts a garden bird-table he rarely comes to the board, but is content to pick

up the crumbs that fall, and always offers up grace before and after meat. Simply as he warbles his unpretending lay we owe him a debt for this song of Winter cheer—he will sing though the land be buried in snow. From this perhaps came one of his familiar names, “Winter Fauvette”—names all so much better than his proper one, since he is no sparrow. Hedge-warbler well suits him, if less distinctive than “Dunnock,” or “Shufflewing,” from his habit of flirting his wings when courting. Now and then he sings after dark.

LEAST of the bird musicians of Winter is the corn-bunting. He plays the triangle in the winter

The Clod band for the twenty other performers. His
Bird music (more in harmony with golden corn-fields than pale winter sunshine) is in

keeping with his lethargic appearance; he is a veritable clod-hopper among birds, and was well-named clod-bird from his habit of perching on any little elevation of a flat field. His monotonous song starts off like an imitation of the yellow hammer's, but it lacks any musical merit, and tumbles all to pieces, as soon as started, in a confused jumble.

SONGS OF CHEER

BESIDE the dove, the white-bibbed dipper is beginning his Winter song, a sweet, if low-pitched melody. The Derbyshire dippers may seek out mudflats of tidal rivers as Winter comes on; others are faithful to their favourite river-stretches the year through. A North-country name is "Bettydowker," a dowker being one who continually bobs the head, as the dipper does unceasingly while it jerkily flits from rock to rock, or runs or oars itself with its wings in the stream. This little bird always strikes a pleasing note, alike by its lively presence and its charming Winter song.

OUR fathers dubbed the little wren, "troglodyte"; and it is a veritable cave-bird in hard weather and in snow-time, when in some deep old lane it spends the day hopping in and out of the hedgebank's holes and crannies, among the exposed tree-roots. Here it picks up a fat living when birds of the open are reduced by two days' snow to skeletons, when redwings are to be picked up from the hedgerows, and the song is frozen in the lark's throat. Wrens of stream-sides live in the manner of snipe during frosts, and their tiny rounded wings and long bills for probing allow them to slip readily through the frozen grasses of the banks. The French call the wren, "Father of the woodcock," from a similarity in the plumage of the birds, whose habits have this curious affinity.

SOME Cornish naturalists claim that their little home-keeping wren of the stone hedge is a distinct race,

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

Home-keeping Wrens like the St. Kilda wren, and that its family was settled in the Far West before the Bronze Age. Perhaps the wren is nowhere more plentiful than in Cornwall, where every length of stone hedge has a wren to sing in Summer and Winter; while it abounds on the rocky coast, outpouring its brilliant lyric above the roar of the Atlantic. The wren's Winter song may arise from its deep-seated nesting instinct, which makes a cock wren build several nests and roost in old ones.

THE YEAR'S SUNSET

IN the woods the year fades apace, with all its "dreams of greatness." Now that the leaves have fallen, like the year's hopes, interest tends to focus on fox and pheasant. Other long-tails which relieve the sadness of the Fall are the charming long-tailed tits—"Mum-ruffins" as country boys used to call them, leading a gypsy life, and following their leader among the leafless but budding branches: suggesting flights of arrows. Probably the party is made up of one family only; this titmouse believes in large families. Where a Winter party a score strong is seen, there is presumptive evidence that the father of the family is a bigamist.

WOODLAND FOLK

IN the wintry beech-woods many feasters are still discovered enjoying the beech-mast, and the loud "Pink, pink!" calls of a flock of chaffinches, in their harlequin array, tell of their good hunting among the fallen leaves;

WINTER GUESTS

or it is a cloud of bramble-finches among the mast which hold the eye by their tawny plumage: the chaffinches' nearest relatives. That our cheery chaffinch is the genuine original finch is suggested by its old Teutonic names, Vink and Fink (which we have translated to finch), derived from the call-note. It is a bird of many local names, like copper, white or silver finch, and chink, pink and twink. The old-time bird-catchers knew that a decoy chaffinch, by its aggressive notes of challenge, would draw a variety of other birds to their doom on limed sticks, and gave it the proud name of Battling Finch.

A WOOD may seem asleep in January; but at once there is a sense of liveliness when a roving band
The of the long-tails drifts waywardly along,
Titmouse spilling tinkling notes; these are among the
Rout least sounds of the wood, yet ring distinctly,
as the birds flit about the branches in their haphazard way, as often as not landing on twigs upside-down. Their lightsome flight suggests care-free hearts; and in this they are in marked contrast to the tree-creepers that like to bear them company, and spend all their day in climbing tree-stems. The tree-creeper is perhaps the most silent, serious, and purposeful of the birds in the wood, a pattern of diligence to the rollicking titmouse crew.

WINTER GUESTS

A WEEK of Winter brings the fieldfares in force from their northern homes to our open meadows,
Foreign where they at once seek the hedgerow
Thrushes berries. In warm weather, when well fed,

they are the most vigilant of birds, but a cold snap quickly robs them of their wariness. If alarmed, as they sit moodily in some moist, lowland meadow, perhaps in association with snipe, instead of their alert flight, with the loud, throaty chucklings, they flutter weakly to the nearest cover. The handsomest of the thrushes, these foreigners lack the fine spirit and strength of our own stormcocks.

A CERTAIN gamekeeper shot a crow, and hung it by the neck on a lonely woodland gibbet. This *Honey in the Carcass* sacrifice on his game-bird's altar took place some time ago, and was forgotten; but when lately passing the gibbet as dusk was falling, the keeper observed that his victim's carcass harboured a wren's nest of dry leaves, cunningly woven among the bones. He probed it with his stick, whereupon came a fluttering of agitated wings, and wren upon wren—"there seemed a score at least," he assured us—shot forth from the strange dormitory. It reminded us of Scott's fine lines about the fieldfare nesting among the bones of a slain warrior:

Beneath the broad and ample bone,
That bucklered heart to fear unknown,
A feeble and a timorous guest,
The Fieldfare framed her lowly nest.

It is supposed by bird-authorities that the poet confused the fieldfare with the snow-bunting.

"A SHEPHERD saw, as he thought, some white larks on a down above my house this winter; were

WINTER GUESTS

The Snow not these the snow-flake? ” asked Gilbert
Bird White, and seemed satisfied that they were stragglers from migrating flocks. We may claim the snow-flake or snow-bunting for a British bird, since it breeds in the Highlands, but more is seen of those that appear in Winter on our eastern shores. Pretty, active little birds, they add a welcome liveliness to marsh and mudflat. Arctic travellers say that against the snow the white parts of the black and white forms are lost to view, and the birds look like a flock of black butterflies. But when seen against our grey winter skies the white-flecked plumage takes the eye as a flock rises, and wheels compactly, and settles again to the music of tinkling calls.

AMONG the choicest of our bird visitors in Winter—
though all too irregular a visitor—is the
Bird winsome little siskin, a charming study in
Magicians lemon and black. It haunts delightful places—to the writer its name conjures at once a picture of a Sussex forest gill, with alders bordering a stream, and the birds searching for seeds in the trees in pretty tit-like attitudes, all members of a flock twittering to one another as they feed. Sociable birds, they like the company of redpolls, linnets, and other country cousins. The skilful way they hide their nests when building in pines or firs in the North gave rise to a siskin legend—that they make the nests invisible by putting magic stones among the eggs.

A RARE pleasure of a cold winter spell is to fall in with a party of waxwings, or Bohemian chatterers,

Bohemian Chatterers beautiful and gentle little birds, famed for having some of their feathers tipped as with strands of sealing-wax. They are further adorned with silky crests and gold-tipped tails. Sociable creatures, travelling in flocks several hundreds strong, they seem well disposed to one another, and though tame and artless, are quick to raise their crests if alarmed, uttering tit-like notes of warning. They are famed also for their lively appetites, and make no more ado about swallowing a rose-hip than a haw or a privet-berry. The name, chatterer, is ill-deserved, as the gay-looking birds are remarkably silent.

CROSSBILLS, though among our birds which are familiar by name, are rarely seen as at fitful intervals
British Parrots they roam in pine-woods. They are remarkable in many ways, as for their parrot-like bills with the curved and crossed points, and for the variation of their rich green, yellow and crimson hues. They are well likened to parrots, since they use their bills for pulling themselves about the branches, and have a parrot-like way of eating. It is supposed that the peculiar bill allows such a twist to be given to a fir-cone that the seed falls directly into the mouth. They are famed for their tameness, for they will split their cones within hand's reach of a quiet observer.

MANY active little birds delight in Winter in the groves of young alders, watered by some stream,
The Alder-Holt which countrymen call an alder-holt. They are the haunts of restless, ever-cheerful siskins, in their olive-green coats, who may

SHORE - BIRDS

be joined by goldfinches and lesser redpolls, the three species hunting the alders for food in happy company. The loud, clear call-note of the siskins, who are never still a moment, suggests the coal-tit's call, and a band of this titmouse may join forces with their party. Or a pack of long-tailed titmice will keep them company for awhile. Ten or twenty of the long-tails will flit in quick succession through the trees, the one in front luring on the next by its shrill note, showing that they find the alder-holt an ideal place for their eternal game of follow-my-leader.

SHORE - BIRDS

AMONG beautiful bird pictures that belong more especially to Winter is that of a flock of *Sea Snipe* dunlin drifting over beach, sands, or mudflats. The flock wheels as one, now showing the dark upper plumage, then the white underparts; it is like a smoky cloud that suddenly flashes with silver light. The graceful little birds make a charming picture, too, when feeding, as they pursue retreating waves to dart on their prey, and run like silvery specks over the grey mudflats, all chattering and eagerly dibbling, happy in their element of ooze and sea-wrack. Being the most abundant of our migratory waders they have come by many local names—churre and purre from the mournful whistle, and stint, oxbird, sea-lark and sea-snipe, while when they leave the coasts, to breed in the lonely moorland haunts of the plover, they are “ plovers’ pages.”

THE turnstone is almost the most abundant of our smaller shore-birds, a bird famous for the awl-shaped

Autolycus beak with which it turns the stones and
of the débris sheltering sandhoppers and such
Shore unconsidered trifles. Turnstones know the
 benefit of co-operation when the sea has
 cast up a large fish too heavy for one to turn. On such
 occasions some will dig the sand below the fish, while
 others work to turn it from the other side. In one sports-
 man's story, a salmon, while being thus overturned,
 toppled over so suddenly that it imprisoned one
 of the digging party, on which the sportsman's spaniel
 of its own accord ran in, rescued the bird, and brought
 it uninjured to his master. A feeding flock of turnstones
 makes one of the most amusing bird pictures of the
 longshore. The way they hunt among the flotsam and
 jetsam of the sands, the stones, dead fish, driftwood,
 seaweeds, and shells for their crustacean fare, shrimps
 and sandhoppers, has been well likened to a man tossing
 hay. Sometimes all their efforts go to the benefit of
 others, as some more agile wader darts upon and steals
 their treasure-trove.

NOISIEST and wariest of shore-birds is the redshank;
 they say that its shrill and piercing note
The may be heard on a still day a mile away, an
Marsh's alarm well understood by the other waders.
Sentry At all seasons these keen sentries greet
 trespassers with wild cries, especially in
 nesting days, when they circle overhead, or dash down
 as if to mob the intruder; very graceful they are as they
 wheel about, the quivering flight alternating with
 poising, when they hang on wings pointing stiffly
 downwards. Like others of its kind, the redshank plays

THE HIBERNATORS

the pathetically threadbare tricks of fluttering as if hurt, to lure intruders from its young.

At the sign of the poulterer the golden plover takes the eye, with its gold-speckled plumage, which
Golden on its native moor is at one with the
Plover heather, grasses, green turf, black peat and white cotton-grass. Marshes, mudflats, and sandbanks are now its haunt, and to our coasts come migratory plover forces from northern climes, in waves that may flow on far to the south of the equator. Their whistling cry is a pleasant and musical sound, without the mournfulness of the peewit's wail. Golden plover may be tame on arriving at the coast, but grow wary if their life is sought, and will hardly stay in the same parish as the man with a gun.

THE HIBERNATORS

THE dormouse, fat on nuts and acorns, has retired for the Winter, judging by a dozen inhabited
The nests found in one small thicket. There is
Seventh good proof, though the point is disputed,
Sleeper that he lays up a store of nuts against the day of waking. In the oval grass-ball that is his dormitory he fits, wound in his tail, as closely as the yolk of an egg in the shell, and his sleep is twin-brother of death. All his ways are ways that are dark; he sleeps for two-thirds of his life, and when awake hunts mostly by twilight and in the night, keeping to cover where he is safe from owls. It seems a dull life; as dull as that of his cousin, the squirrel, seems merry.

AN ARCADIAN CALENDAR

A PIPISTRELLE bat is among the regular attendants at evensong in an old country church, and
The Bat throughout the service hawks back and
in Church forth in the nave, making marvellous twists and turns among the many obstacles in its path, low rafters, banners, candelabra, and a great suspended crucifix. It passes them by a hair's-breadth, and one can hardly fail to watch and admire its flying skill. Certainly the church bat is a distraction to choir-boys. One wonders how it finds a living. It may sleep through the week when the church is closed. Awakened by the warmth and lights of Sunday, possibly it suffers from a recurring delusion that Spring is come.

A PRIVATEER

IN an old deer park there has been daily evidence of late of the presence of a sparrow-hawk—
The Spar'- the damning evidence of lightly-spread
Hawk rings of feathers, usually of finches, sometimes of thrush or fieldfare, occasionally of a partridge or wood-pigeon. Among the relics may be a few drops of blood, and perhaps fragments of a beak, claw, or shattered skull. But you may cross the park daily, and rarely see another sign of the privateer. The noble peregrine, the patient kestrel, and the lazy buzzard, hunt openly. But the spar'-hawk dashes stealthily over hedges, pounces round corners and through gaps, and comes and goes like a shadow, only leaving these pitiful rings of feathers to tell of his hunting.

THE wild garden of a Sussex manor-house is now supplying an excellent opportunity for studying

A FARMER'S FRIENDS AND FOES

A Wild Garden's Dragon the habits of the sparrow-hawk. In the garden-marsh is a dense patch of bamboo, whither a flock of starlings resort nightly, finding it a desirable roosting-place. But always the sparrow-hawk is lying in wait, like some fabled dragon, and he never fails to take his toll. So he has been known to devote his exclusive attention to one small bit of wild fenland, striking at every teal that comes in, and to haunt a spinney where he can dine off wood-pigeon for a long season. But we hope that a good thing credited to Sam Weller was not taken from life: "I'll be with you in a minute, as the sparrow-hawk said when he heard the robin singing round the corner."

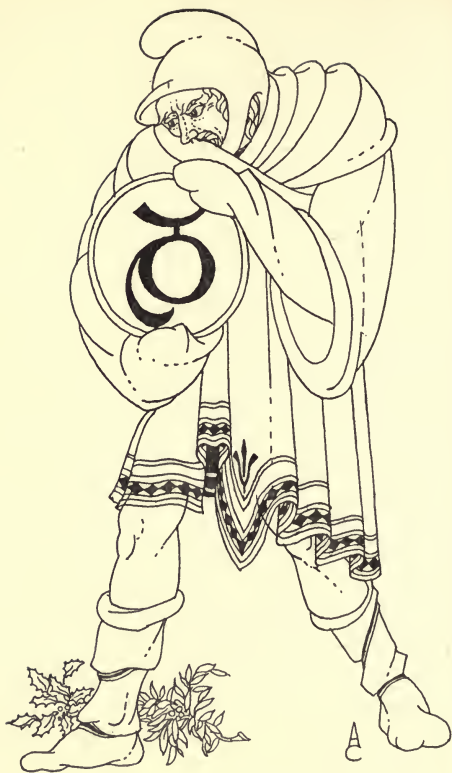
A FARMER'S FRIENDS AND FOES

WHEN the lights are out in the farmhouse kitchen, the crickets come forth for their midnight *Cricket of the Hearth* revels, and at this season atoms of baby crickets appear, learning to run and leap. Gilbert White delighted in surprising his kitchen crickets with a candle, as they sported on his hearth at Selborne, to note how their guardians would utter two or three shrill notes, as a signal to all to bolt to their crannies. Crickets are fastidious about their hearths, and sometimes seek fresh quarters by migrating. They are remarkable examples of insects which have abandoned the open-air life of their own accord; for nowhere, according to naturalists, either in the old or new world, is the house-cricket known to live out-o'-doors.

THE farmer is wroth if he finds a mole-cricket among his potatoes, but probably it is engaged only on seeking wire-worms. This insect is built on the lines of the mole, and is furnished with digging implements even more wonderful than the mole's, while it wears a hood, for sheltering its head, with hairs as fine as the gentleman's in velvet. The wonder of the creature is in its powerful front legs, at once digging and cutting implements, with points like the teeth of a saw, across which another toothed part of the foot works like a cutting-blade, to sever roots when burrowing.

AN old farmer gave us an interesting point about old barns: in his grandfather's time, he said, when grain was stored in the great barns, a man building a new barn would leave what was called an "owl hole" under the gable, so that barn owls might be free to come and go, and encouraged to hunt the rats and mice. Barns always have a strong attraction for these owls (as for sparrows and swallows); barns or belfries they seem to think their ideal nesting sites, though some owls like holes in trees, even if the tree be already occupied by nesting jackdaws and starlings. They are in no way particular about seclusion; and passers-by often hear, sometimes to their alarm, the heavy snoring of the birds in the nest.

DECEMBER





DECEMBER

A HORRID and fearful aspect, clad in Irish-Rags, or course Freez girt unto him, upon his Head three or four Night-Caps, and over them a Turkish Turbant; his Nose red, his Mouth and Beard clog'd with Isicles, at his back a bundle of Holly, Ivy or Mistletoe, holding in fur'd Mittens the Sign of *Capricornus*.

BIRDS AND THE MAN

THE hurdler complains that hard frost makes his hazel-rods brittle, so that they snap and spoil his output—twelve hurdles a day at his best.

The Hurdler It is always fascinating to watch his skill in splitting the rods and his deftness in their weaving. Boys will not now submit to the tedious training the old hurdler underwent in learning how to cut rods and strip them of knots. The honesty of his work is transparent, though only experts—and time and use—discover where one hurdler excels another. In spite of inevitable rheumatism, a man may enjoy this clean, honest life spent in the quiet woods. The

hurdler is among the last of our open-air craftsmen: and his race is dying.

CERTAIN birds are especially associated with human friends. The wryneck is the woodman's bird, its hawk-like cry in April giving the signal for the stripping of oak-trees' bark. The *Windmill* Thrush The yellow wagtail is a farmer's bird, ushering in the time of spring sowings. As the sandpiper is the angler's companion, the wheatear keeps the shepherd company on lonely downs. Even the miller has his bird in the redwing, called "windmill thrush," since the working of its wings suggests the revolving of a windmill's sails, while it is supposed to seek shelter by windmills in hard weather. Redwings now arrive in force; the pity is that few windmills are left to keep up the traditional association.

WINTER SKETCHES

ONE country sound is most typical of the intense stillness of a late Winter afternoon, when, perhaps, there is snow on the hills and fog in the vale: the crow of Chanticleer. He likes to take advantage of the silence to make the welkin ring. The least sounds seem almost noisy: acorns pattering on a pond, tinkling notes of titmice; a blackbird's alarm creates a babel, and a shot in the wood wakens reverberating echoes. The huntsman's horn strikes a welcome note of cheer on a dull afternoon; and the sense of gloom at dusk is banished for a moment by the colours of the picture made by hounds jogging home, the scarlet of a coat, the red of a mask dangling at a saddle.

WINTER SKETCHES

THE huntsman is quick to heed the voice of the jay, which so often betrays the slipping away of *Reynard's* his fox; the gamekeeper, too, appreciates *Betrayers* the jay as a spy on the fox, as on poachers and trespassers; he is not one to screech for nothing. The crafty cock pheasant, the ever-vigilant little owl, and the wren, with his watchman's rattle, are all quick to raise the alarm when a red shadow fleets across a woodland ride. And the carrion crow, a scarce bird to-day, has often been known to follow closely the movements of a fox when hounds have forced him into the open.

FIFTY years ago the crow was a common bird of our woodlands, but it fell on evil days, and *Miniature* naturalists would often lament that this *Ravens* raven in miniature was following the raven into a list of vanished fauna. One instinct was strongly against its chance of surviving shots from farmers' and gamekeepers' guns, its persistence in returning, March after March, to places where its ancestors nested through centuries. Better times have come for crows, and they are doing much of their own wisdom to save themselves by adopting the life of town birds, some even nesting in Hyde Park.

TANGLED clusters of twigs on birch-trees, called witches' brooms, are commonly mistaken for crows'-*Witches'* nests. In olden days it was naturally sup-*Brooms* posed that witches, given to riding on brooms, specially favoured those which the obliging tree miraculously produced. Possibly the curious growths are due to a fungus, which so excites

the tree that it puts forth many hundreds of buds, developing into immense clusters of twigs. The brooms have a picturesqueness, their dark masses contrasting with the light grace of the tree; it is as if the dainty "lady of the woods" has sought to set off her charms by adopting beauty-patches.

THE West Country is specially favoured in Winter by the graceful presence of grey wagtails, so abundant that at times every rock in the *Water* bed of a stream seems to have its dancing *Sprites* sprite. They are great lovers of water, and rarely stray far from streams (nor could they easily do so in Devon), finding their living among the water insects, which they often pursue by nimbly running over the leaves of water-plants. In a few weeks the birds will be putting on their black gorgets of courting days. They share the pied wagtail's love of a ditch, which possibly gave that bird its puzzling country name, Dishwasher—a contraction, it may be, of "Ditch-watcher."

IN a sportsman's view the partridge is never a more sporting mark than in December. The *Cunning* callow birds of September have grown in *Game* strength, speed and elusiveness out of all *Birds* knowledge. They fly like bullets. Cover is scanty now, and they have mastered some marvellous vanishing-tricks. And pheasants, the older cocks especially, grow ever more cunning as Christmas looms nearer, trusting their lives more and more to their strong, swift legs. The craftiest old cock is he who believes in a solitary life for the time being; and he may

GARDEN BIRDS

elect to roost by himself far from the coverts, in some lonely tree in open fields.

GARDEN BIRDS

WHEN the garden birds, tamed by cold, troop to the house windows for food, Dick Dunnock, *Dick* the hedge-sparrow (bird of forty names), *Dunnock* is sure to have a modest place in the throng, with his mate beside him. Their hearts are as faithful as the hearts of a pair of crows, and they are always side by side, even roosting at night cuddled one to another. When seen at close quarters, the quiet beauty of the dunnock's dun plumage is very taking, as delicately pencilled as a water-rail's.

WHEN a greenfinch is attracted to a garden in Winter, as by sunflower seeds, he cuts a striking *An* figure at the bird-table, for there is something prosperous, portly and aldermanic *Engaging* in his dapper appearance, with his smart *Finch* sage-green coat, slashed with yellow. The greenfinch is not famed for song, though his somewhat canary-like trilling in season seems full of jollity and summery ideas; he and his mate are slovenly nest-builders; but their prosperous air suggests that they know the art of living well, when others are pressed for food, and, generally, "times be badish vor the poor."

THE starling is looked upon as a dandy of the bird world, like the green woodpecker, so *Starling* happily named "popinjay," but he might *Fashions* claim to enjoy a peculiar range of fashions.

Viewed on a chimney-pot in December sunshine, he seems to demand admiration for his greenish-black plumage, wonderfully glossed and burnished with purple, green and violet reflections, changing in different lights; and his spots show bravely. These he presently discards, to put on his more sheeny wedding-coat, while his mate remains spotted and speckled, and is less brilliantly iridescent. The sign of the old English starling, the "stare," is his green-glossed head, and he is now a scarce bird in relation to the hordes of Continental immigrants.

BIRD TRAVELLERS

SEVERE winter weather drives in flocks of the Brent goose to the East coast, a wary species, and much prized by connoisseurs in the gastronomy of wildfowl: "A Brent for your life, on the table!" has been recorded as the emphatic opinion of East Anglian punt-gunners. This goose, in sooty grey, has a distinctly snake-like head. The blackness of the head and neck are relieved by the white neck-patches. It is our commonest wild goose in Winter. Hardly larger than a common duck, it is a Tom Thumb beside the magnificent, yard-long greylag, a bird for which we have a special regard in that its ancestors gave us our Christmas geese.

ANYONE fortunate enough to see a swallow at this time need not refuse to believe his eyes. The December swallow is not a wonderfully rare bird in the West Country. When people report very late or early swallows they are

usually informed that they have seen starlings, which will fly, when in dashing mood and hawking insects in the air, with much of the swallows' grace and speed. But there is overwhelming testimony from West-Country naturalists that in mild seasons the swallow tribe lingers with us far into December. At Marazion, in Cornwall, martins have been flying about the cliffs as late as December 17th, and swallows have been seen in the south a day later. The loiterers would no doubt be birds of third broods which missed the day appointed for general migration in October.

A PRETTY conceit about the phrase, "Showing the white feather," is that it arose from the way the wheatear, that shepherd's companion, flashes its white rump as it flutters timidly before any intruder of its haunts, even before a cloud-shadow. Yet a few wheatears will face a winter in England, and in the delicate climate of Cornwall may be found hovering about the rocks at Land's End. True, these may be shirking the perils of a sea voyage; but in another way the bird of the white feather shows a brave heart, for it is often the first migrant to come home in March, and its delicious wild warble is the first Spring song.

THE music of night-wandering birds falls on few ears, yet Winter's nights have their melodies as well as June's. In Devonshire, a country where owls are marvellously abundant, nights now are loud with mellow hooting, diversified by the white owl's blood-curdling shrieks. It is the marsh-man of the East

Coast who, on a frosty winter's night, marks, at an immense distance, the wild rushing of the wings of the wigeon, with which mingles the beautiful "whee-ou" whistle, a music which comes and goes like the wind as the company sweeps by, on its multitudinous wings, wheels, retires, and comes again. In mid-Winter, wigeon feed at night, resting by day on the sea. Some old flight-shooters say that wigeon-shooting is like fox-hunting for excitement. Undoubtedly the birds are good eating.

DECEMBER CHARACTERS

THE pygmy shrew, that Tom Thumb of mammals, must have a brave heart to come abroad, *Midget* as he will, in sharp frost, and one wonders *Mammals* what insects he can find to eat, worms or small snails; by day the midget hunter is in peril from weasels and by night from owls. No doubt a long spell of frost sends him into a sleep from which there may be no wakening. The water-shrew also may be noted running among the stalactites on the banks of an ice-bound stream, or swimming in the icy water, the black velvety coat turned to a silvery streak, glimmering, as if beset with pearls, by the air bubbles it holds. In the water he is as dry as a duck, and may prove a dainty tit-bit for a starving pike.

THE water-shrew is at once our most timid and, for his size, most ferocious animal, a very gallant *An* fighter. So timid he is that a passing shadow *Angler's* will send him (like a wheatear) scurrying to *Friend* the burrow; but he seems to be short-

DECEMBER CHARACTERS

sighted and nervous of journeying more than a couple of yards or so from the bank, nor will he stay long in the water for fear of soaking his pretty fur. His long snout is never still, and seems to be to this minute beast what a trunk is to an elephant. He is among the angler's favourite companions, like the dipper, the grey wagtail, and the sandpiper.

WE see little of the winter sleepers, except by chance, as when a bit of leather is found on a rafter, and turns out to be a bat. Deep sleepers may better survive mild winters than light ones readily tempted abroad. The pipistrelle's flight on a mild January day may well seem to it like a nightmare, in which it is always about to catch a ghostly insect, but is never nearer a meal. Hedgehogs are notorious (among gamekeepers) for waking before their time, and we have even found one working away at clearing snow from the grass, in the way of a reindeer. How such a deep sleeper as the snail knows when to wake up is a curious problem; perhaps it hears some song-thrush's fervent invitation to come and be killed.

THE mole's work, obvious on many a fair lawn, now brings imprecations on his head, for all the good he may do by eating beetle-grubs. His reputation is for insatiable voracity, and he is the picture of gluttony as he eagerly noses his worm, shakes it, tramples on it, and savagely mouths it, possibly to press soil from the body. Nearly blind, with fur-covered eyes smaller than

a pin's head, he runs grave, though perhaps to him unimaginable, risks by tunnelling almost in view of fox, weasel, badger, heron or owl, and the human mole-catcher.

MOLES of Devon have another foe to fear in the buzzard, a past-master of mole-catching arts. *Mole Catchers* Sitting in his patient way on a tree or stone hedge, the buzzard will watch the workings of a mole as it tunnels in a field, until the deadly pounce can be made. A Devon mole-catcher showed the writer a cream-coloured specimen, whose pelt he hoped to make into a purse, and sell for a sovereign. He had never heard the statement made in the "Philosopher's Banquet," published 1633, that water in which moles are boiled will turn any black thing white, and expressed some doubt of its truth.

It is the time of year when a gardener, putting things to rights, encounters under some old flower-pot the beetle called devil's coach-horse, from its fleetness, diabolical aspect, threatening attitudes, and jet-black livery. *The Devil's Coach-horse* Its distinctive mannerism is the turning over of its tail-end for the neat folding of beautiful long wings beneath short cases. It would rank as a gardener's ally, if he believed it fed on slugs and insect larvæ. Its weapons of defence are its jaws and its glands, which shoot out a secretion of such evil odour that a wise bird leaves it alone in disgust, whence the name, *olens*. It is an insect skunk.

CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

MANY birds are opportunists; witness the way the garden robin appears on the scene as the *Thrushes* gardener takes spade in hand, and how the *and Moles* skua chases the fishing gulls till they disgorge their catch for his benefit. The thrush has an eye for moles; it is an old sign of frost breaking when thrushes probe mole-hills for worms. A remarkable instance of a thrush working on the principle "Opportunity is bald behind," was noted when one was eagerly following the tunnellings of an invisible mole just below a lawn's surface, gobbling up such worms as managed to escape the mole's jaws.

CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

ONCE again this week, as of old,

The Forth to the wood did merry men go
To gather in the mistletoe.

Mistletoe It is a curious reflection how badly the
Bough birds have been treated, since time out of mind, by Christmas raids on holly and mistletoe, whose berries, ripening late, form a useful reserve of food. And both holly and mistletoe were esteemed by the fowler for making bird-lime. The word mistletoe is traced to the Anglo-Saxon mistl, glue, and tan, twig. So the grey thrush, named mistletoe thrush from its delight in the berries, would find the favourite food-plant turned treacherously to its undoing; and still has cause of complaint in our Christmas use of the sacred mistletoe bough.

EVERY month has its flower, even December: thirty varieties or more might be found in the *December's* month. We may count on finding four *Flowers* wildings in bloom, poor things indeed, which would make a parody of a nosegay—chickweed, shepherd's purse, red dead-nettle and groundsel, which, however lowly, nourishes goldfinches, and when brought to town and sold in the streets gives a Christmas treat to the Cockney canary. December could hardly claim any shy primroses or violets (which peer up at a green winter) and might not care for a dandelion badge. But there is one flower with a strong claim to be emblematic of the dark, still days before Christmas, the furze blossom, now spreading a golden glory on the heaths. It was to the few flowers of December that Gilbert White looked for his notes for the month when drawing up his "Naturalist's Calendar." He made but nine notes for December, as against ninety-nine for the month of roses, and seven of the nine were flower-notes. He saw young lambs on the eleventh day, and on the next day noted, "Moles work in throwing up hillocks"; and closed his calendar by the thought for December's last day, "In sese vertitur annus."

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